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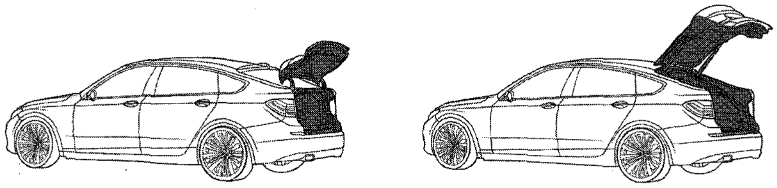

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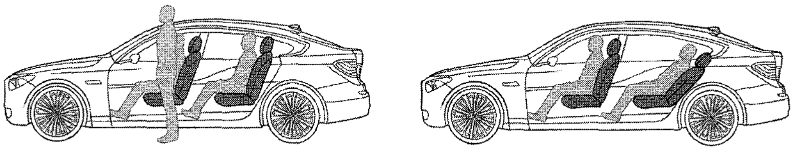

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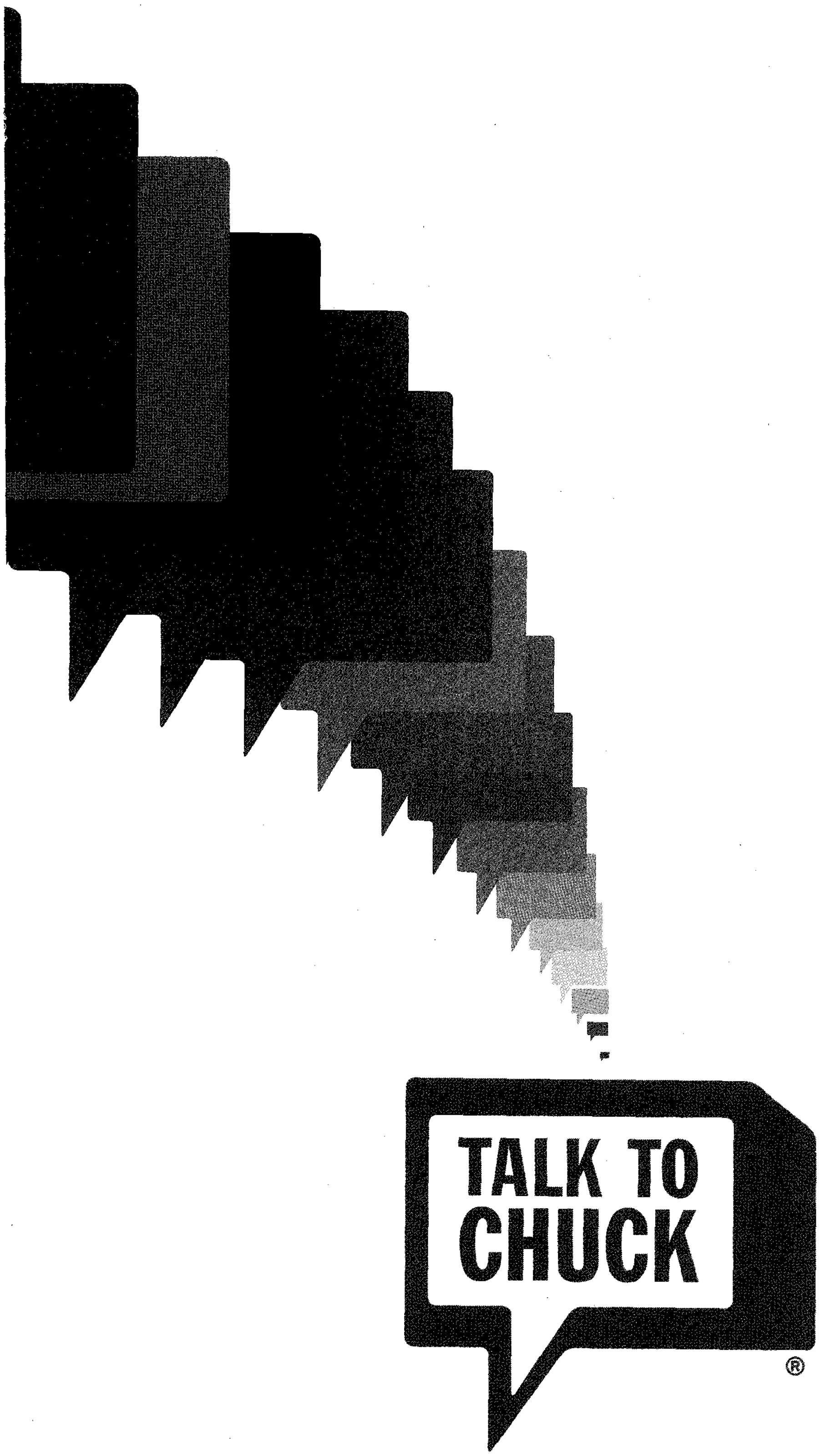

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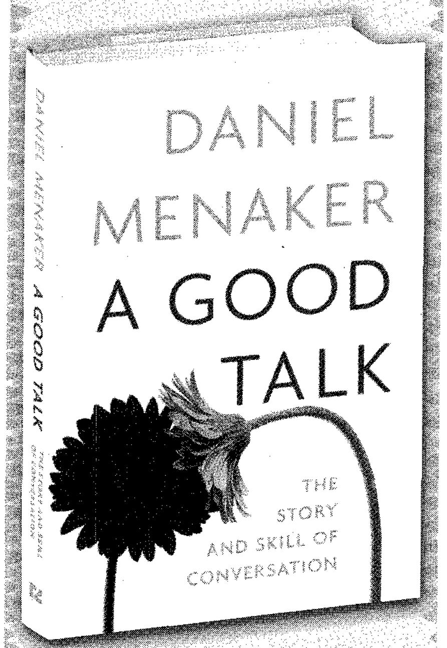
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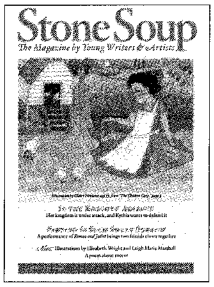

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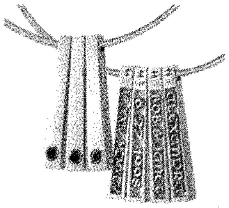

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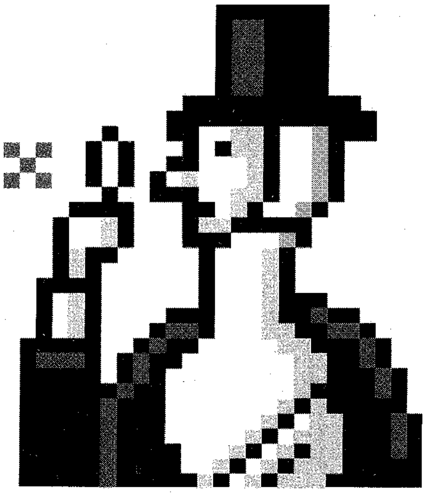
THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM
Ask the Author: Live chats with *Hendrik Hertzberg* and *Ariel Levy.* / Audio: *John Cassidy* talks to *Blake Eskin* about economics after the meltdown; *Dorothy Wickenden* hosts the Political Scene. / Video: *James Surowiecki* interviews David Cutler about health-care reform; a history of the Lincoln Center fountain; *Richard Brody's* DVD of the Week; *Jorge Colombo's* Finger Painting. / Blogs: *John Cassidy*, *Steve Coll*, and *Amy Davidson* on current affairs, *Macy Halford* and *Thessaly La Force* on books, and much more. / The Cartoon Kit, the caption contest, and a complete archive of issues, back to 1925.



THE MAIL

PHYSICIANS AND FARMERS

Atul Gawande's assertion that exploding health-care costs are unsustainable is correct; however, the parallels he makes to early-twentieth-century agricultural reform aren't without flaws ("Testing, Testing," December 14th). Turn-of-the-century farmers were offered solutions that increased both their yields and their personal incomes; the pilot programs in our current Senate bill aim at reducing costs, and will, if successful, limit payments to health-care providers. We should, therefore, expect widespread resistance from the health-care industry to even the most elegant cost-containment solutions. In addition, the farmers had no organized voice in Washington, whereas our nation's doctors, hospitals, and pharmaceutical groups have spared no expense in lobbying Congress and have successfully influenced legislation. Finally, unlike the agricultural crisis of the early nineteen-hundreds, our current health-care system is nearing a very real collapse. By 2017, or even earlier, Medicare will be insolvent; its failure will bring down the entire health-care industry. We don't have the luxury of waiting for results from pilot programs in order to slowly change our system.

James B. Rickert, M.D.
Bloomington, Ind.

Gawande's analogy contains two critical assumptions that may limit its applicability. First, agriculture has always had publicly visible prices. Second, input and planting decisions have largely been left to one person, the farmer, who also retains any profits. Health care, by comparison, lacks observed prices, and treats each occasion of service as though it were unique, the very opposite of a commodity. Consumers cannot readily compare physicians or hospitals, so prices themselves are not informative. Further, each part of the "health production chain" is owned by different organizations: physicians, hospitals, insurers, long-term-care providers, pharmacies, and so on. Improved information, via pilot programs or by any other means, has no fertile ground in which to take root: what looks like a new crop to the physician will look like a weed to the insurer. Well-known case studies describe physicians who coördinated care for a group of diabetics, only to see the program cancelled because of deleterious effects on the hospital sponsor from reduced admissions. So, yes, let us test and pilot, but not just for better information and knowledge of comparative effectiveness, and not just for improved prices and insurance coverage, but also for improvements in the structure and organization of medicine as well: figuring out how to define providers, who should bear financial risks, and how to align incentives through new structures of ownership and linked payments.

Stanley Chin
Alexandria, Va.
Paul Hughes-Cromwick
Ann Arbor, Mich.

Pilot programs succeeded in disseminating modern methods of farming because these methods increased farmers' income. But the programs were so successful that, faced with the prospect of depressed commodity prices, the government devised a decidedly non-pilot program: subsidies that pay farmers when they overproduce and pay others to keep fields fallow. This is indeed a "master plan," and it's still in existence. In our current health-care crisis, we aren't in a pilot-program phase; any doctor who wants to do so can find out the clinically proven method to treat a disease. The problem is overtreatment. The overproduction of crops required a large-scale government intervention, and so will the overtreatment of the American populace. We have federal agricultural-extension agents across the nation. Why not government doctors, too?

Stephen Hagenbuch
Campbell, N.Y.

•

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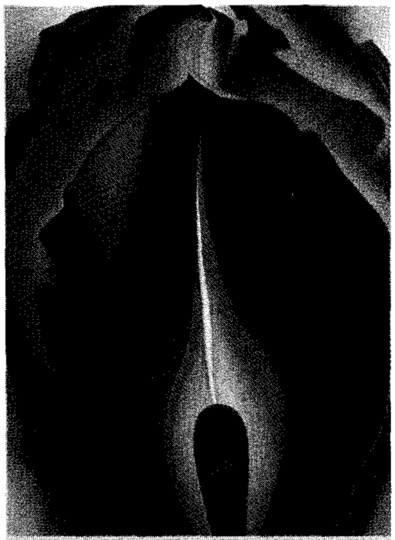

Georgia O'Keeffe. "Series I, No. 4," (1918). Oil on canvas, 20 × 16 in. (50.8 × 40.6 cm.). Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich. Gift of the Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation. © Georgia O'Keeffe Museum/Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York.

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Mariusz Kwiecien at a fitting for Bizet's "Carmen," at the Met. Photograph by Lisa Kereszi.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
REGAL REVISIONIST

Before she moved to New York and became a playwright, Young Jean Lee spent several years in Berkeley, writing her doctoral thesis on "King Lear." Now, at SoHo Rep, she directs her play "Lear," which shifts the focus onto the king's three difficult daughters. (See page 10.)

NIGHT LIFE
KINGS OF KINGS

Over the past few years, an eccentric music scene has blossomed at Barbès, a little club in Park Slope, Brooklyn. A few of the club's more-or-less regular acts—the harmonica-and-tuba-driven band Hazmat Modine, the dulcet Latin group Las Rubias del Norte, the carnivalesque ensemble One Ring Zero, and the erudite folk-music collective the Wingdale Community Singers—descend upon the Mercury Lounge, in Manhattan. (See page 11.)

ART
WILD BUNCH

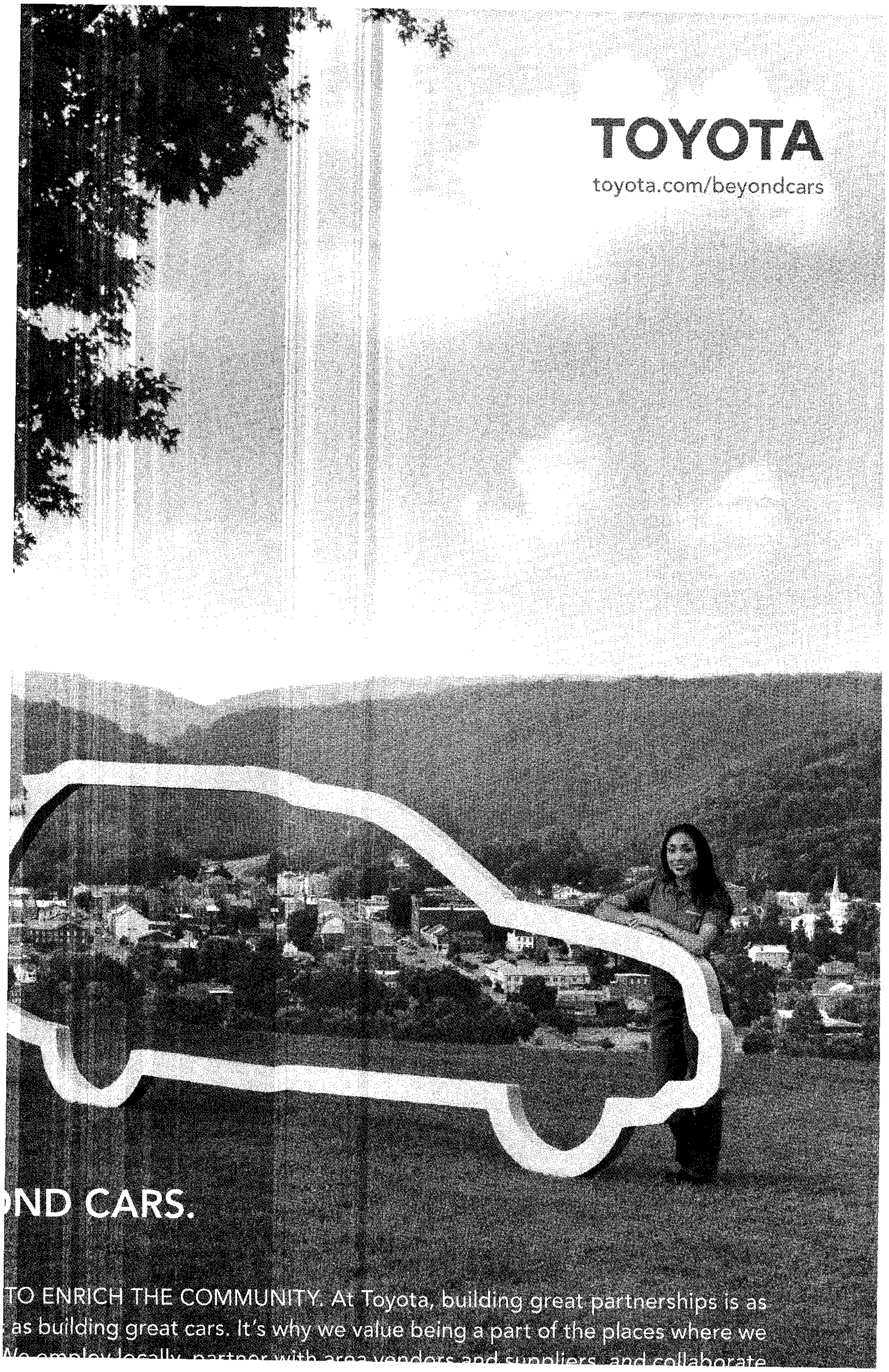
For "Downtown Pix: Mining the Fales Archives, 1961-1991," at the Grey Art Gallery, the curator, Philip Gefter, sifted through thousands of photographs and chose some hundred and seventy to convey the irreverent spirit of an era in which, as he writes, "formal conventions were abandoned with a kind of nose-thumbing glee." (See page 13.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
A CUT ABOVE

Bleecker Street Opera, one of two companies formed out of the now defunct Amato Opera, has brought a welcome dose of professionalism to the old franchise. Its new production is of Rossini's "Barber of Seville." (See page 16.)

MOVIES
THE FINGER MAN

Film Society of Lincoln Center winks at the concert halls across the way with a series of movies about Frédéric Chopin, including the Polish film "Young Chopin," from 1952; "Impromptu," from 1991, which stars Hugh Grant as the composer and Judy Davis as George Sand; and concert footage from the International Chopin Piano Competition. (See page 20.)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THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

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AGES OF THE MOON
Two men, longtime friends and rivals, are the focus of Sam Shepard's play, which originated at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin. Stephen Rea and Sean McGinley, for whom the roles were written, star; Jimmy Fay directs. Previews begin Jan. 12. (Atlantic Theatre Company, 336 W. 20th St. 212-279-4200.)

AS YOU LIKE IT
At BAM, the Bridge Project presents the Shakespeare comedy, starring Alvin Epstein, Stephen Dillane, Christian Camargo, Ron Cephas Jones, Thomas Sadoski, Michelle Beck, and Juliet Rylance. Sam Mendes directs. Previews begin Jan. 12. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100.)

AUNT LEAF
Barbara Wiechmann wrote this play, a dark fairy tale set in the Hudson River Valley. Jeffrey Mousseau directs. Previews begin Jan. 7. Opens Jan. 10. (HERE Arts Center, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 212-352-3101.)

COIL
P.S. 122 presents its annual festival of contemporary performing arts, including works by Richard Maxwell ("Ads"), Morgan Thorson and Low ("Heaven"), and Lisa D'Amour & Katie Pearl with Emily Johnson ("Terrible Things"). Opens Jan. 6. (First Ave. at 9th St. 212-352-3101.)

CULTUREMART 2010
A three-week festival showcasing artists from the HERE Arts Center residencies, featuring theatre, dance, music, new media, puppetry, and visual art. Begins Jan. 12. (145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 212-352-3101.)

LEAR
Young Jean Lee wrote and directs her take on "King Lear," which focusses on the daughters of the king. With choreography by Dean Moss. Previews begin Jan. 7. (SoHo Rep, 46 Walker St. 212-352-3101.)

LITTLE GEM
The winner of the Carol Tambor Best of Edinburgh Award, written by Elaine Murphy and directed by Paul Meade, centers on the adventures of three generations of women in Dublin. In previews. Opens Jan. 7. (Flea, 41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

NEW YORK GILBERT & SULLIVAN PLAYERS
Productions mounted for the company's annual encampment at City Center include "The Mikado," "The Pirates of Penzance," "H.M.S. Pinafore," and, new this year, "Ruddigore." Opens Jan. 8. (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

THE ORPHANS' HOME CYCLE, PART 3
Michael Wilson directs the third part of Horton Foote's trilogy, based on the playwright's father's life in Texas, produced by Hartford Stage and Signature Theatre Company. Previews begin Jan. 7. (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

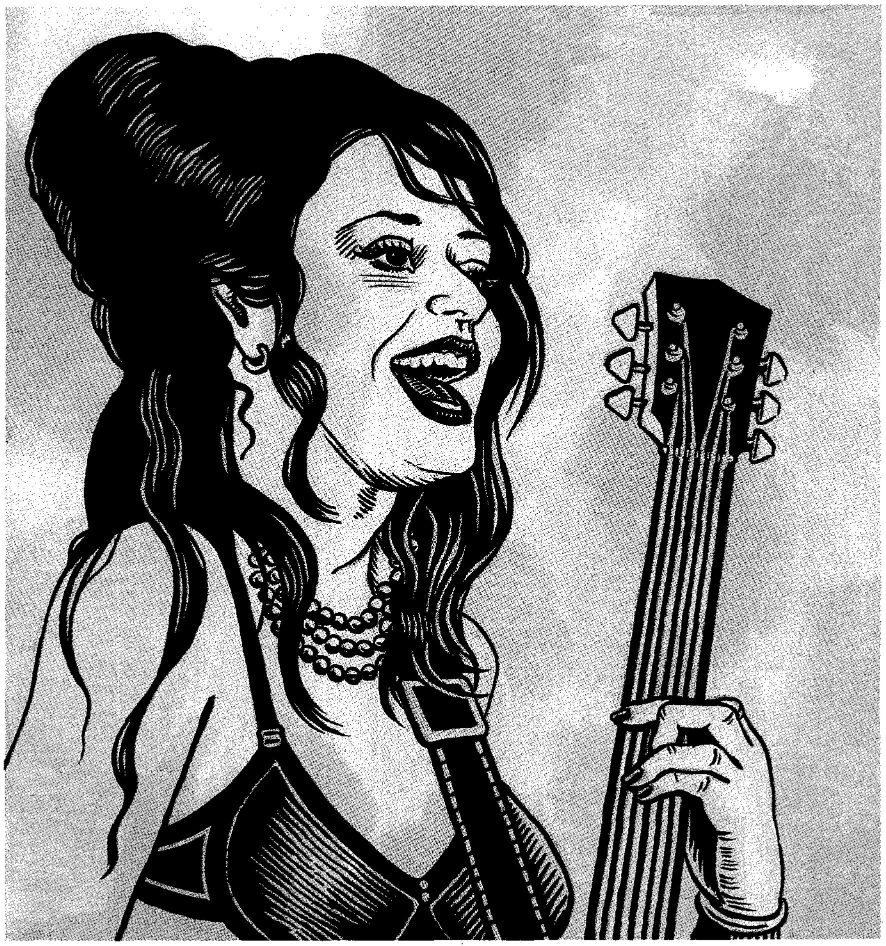
PRESENT LAUGHTER
Victor Garber stars in Noël Coward's farce, about a British actor preparing for a trip to Africa. Nicholas Martin directs, for the Roundabout Theatre Company. In previews. (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.)

SMUDGE
Rachel Axler ("Parks & Recreation," "The Daily Show") wrote this dark comedy, about a woman who gives birth to a smudge. Pam MacKinnon directs the Women's Project production. In previews. Opens Jan. 11. (Julia Miles, 424 W. 55th St. 212-239-6200.)

TIME STANDS STILL
In Donald Margulies's new play, a journalist and a photographer who thrive on their dangerous work are forced by injuries to settle down in New York. Laura Linney, Alicia Silverstone, Brian d'Arcy James, and Eric Bogosian star in the Manhattan Theatre Club production. Daniel Sullivan directs. In previews. (Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

UNDER THE RADAR
The Public's annual festival of up-and-coming artists from around the world returns for its sixth year. Highlights include the National Theatre of the United States of America's "CHAUTAUQUA!," Nick Jones, Raja Azar, and Sam Gold's "Jollyship the Whiz-Bang," and works based on John Cassavetes's "Husbands" and Haruki Murakami's "Wind-Up Bird Chronicle." Opens Jan. 6. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

A VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE
Liev Schreiber and Scarlett Johansson star in Arthur Miller's 1955 drama, directed by Gregory Mosher, about a Brooklyn dockworker who is obsessed with his seventeen-year-old niece. In previews. (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)



The Italian singer-songwriter Carmen Consoli pays a visit to City Winery.

ROBERT PIERSANTI

NOW PLAYING

ERNEST IN LOVE
There are people who will find Anne Croswell's 1960 musical adaptation of Oscar Wilde's brilliant drawing-room comedy "The Importance of Being Earnest" charming; after all, a couple of Lee Pockriss's tunes are catchy, some of Croswell's lyrics are funny, and awkward actors in period costume doing ridiculous dances on a too-small stage can seem heartwarming, especially when it's cold and bleak outside. If you're a fan of the play, though, you'll find yourself wishing that the musical numbers would end so you could get back to the story, of an English dandy unable to marry the well-bred woman he loves because his name isn't Ernest, and because, as an infant, he was found in a handbag at Victoria Station. Directed by Charlotte Moore. (Irish Repertory, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

FELA!
This musical, directed by Bill T. Jones, tells the life story of Fela Kuti, the father of Afrobeat and, in the nineteen-seventies, one of the most popular musicians in West Africa. Like all afterstories of beloved leaders, the musical's account of Fela has notable omissions, especially regarding his religious and sexual politics. But there are two great things in the show: one is Sahr Ngaujah, the man who, for most of the week, plays Fela. How did the producers find a performer who matches Fela in charm, wit, and insolence? Ngaujah is a thrilling actor, with enough moods and tones and nuances that you have no trouble listening to him for more than two hours straight. The second glory of "Fela!" is the dancing, created by Jones. It's hard to make West African dance look bad, but oh how good Jones and the dancers, more than half of them American-born (the others are African or Caribbean), have made it look. (Reviewed in our issue of 12/7/09.) (Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.)

A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC
In this revival of the 1973 show, Stephen Sondheim's beautiful score remains the true star. Gentle, coaxing, and insinuating, the music is audience-friendly, with only hints of the composer's characteristic shadows. Based on Ingmar Bergman's 1955 romp, "Smiles of a Summer Night," the story focusses on a nineteenth-century actress named Desiree Armfeldt (Catherine Zeta-Jones, making her Broadway début), whose games eventually involve her two lovers, their wives, her daughter, and her mother, Madame Armfeldt (Angela Lansbury). The two-act farce (with some drama) has a serviceable book by Hugh Wheeler; he gives the actors enough to do, but it's strange to watch them do it in such poor surroundings. The décor, such as it is, is by David Farley, and one only wonders if the show's director, Trevor Nunn, was trying to emulate John Doyle's minimalist take on previous Sondheim shows by practically stripping the stage bare. But Doyle's ap-

proach to Sondheim was conceptually rich, whereas Nunn's actors seem cramped. Though Zeta-Jones appears to be enjoying herself up there, she's self-conscious, and her elocution—which falls somewhere between her native Wales and Beverly Hills—sometimes strangles Sondheim's lyrics in mid-flight; Lansbury hams it up without even trying. The real revelation here is Alexander Hanson, who plays a lawyer named Fredrik Egerman. He's sexy because he's self-assured, and has a sense of humor. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

RACE

Ruthlessness of a rhetorical kind is part of the fun of David Mamet's new play (directed by the author), his latest exercise in contrarian provocation. "Do you know what you can say? To a black man. On the subject of race?" Henry Brown (David Alan Grier), a black lawyer, says to Charles Strickland (Richard Thomas), a rich, white potential client who is accused of raping a black woman. "Nothing," Charles says. "That is correct," Henry replies. Henry's firm has three lawyers—two of them black—which is the reason that Charles has sought them out. "We have won. By being quick and being brutal. Being fast and first, and tearing off the fucking Band-Aid," the hard-bitten white partner, Jack Lawson (the expert James Spader), explains to Charles. The lawyers' rebarbative style happens also to be Mamet's. Having declared recently, in a piece he wrote for the *Times*, that debates about race are, for the most part, "nothing but sanctimony," Mamet offers instead nothing but cynicism. In this, he is an equal-opportunity employer. (12/14/09) (Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

ROMEO AND JULIET

Nature Theatre of Oklahoma presents this meditation on the Shakespeare play, conceived and directed by Pavol Liska and Kelly Copper. (Reviewed in this issue.) (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793, ext. 11.)

Also Playing

AVENUE Q: New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200. **BILLY ELLIOT THE MUSICAL:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BRIEF ENCOUNTER:** St. Ann's Warehouse, 38 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779. **BYE BYE BIRDIE:** Henry Miller, 124 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200. **CHICAGO:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **CIRCLE MIRROR TRANSFORMATION:** Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. **DO NOT GO GENTLE:** Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Through Jan. 10. **THE EMPEROR JONES:** SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 212-691-1555. **FINIAN'S RAINBOW:** St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **GOD OF CARNAGE:** Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **HAIR: THE AMERICAN TRIBAL LOVE-ROCK MUSICAL:** Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **IN THE NEXT ROOM OR THE VIBRATOR PLAY:** Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **JERSEY BOYS:** August Wilson, 245 W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200. **THE LION KING:** Minskoff, 200 W. 45th St. 212-307-4747. **LOVE, LOSS, AND WHAT I WORE:** Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200. **MAMMA MIA!:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-239-6200. **MEMPHIS:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **MISALLIANCE:** City Center Stage II, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. **NEXT TO NORMAL:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE ORPHANS' HOME CYCLE, PARTS 1 AND 2:** Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529. **OUR TOWN:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-868-4444. **ROCK OF AGES:** Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-4100. **SOUTH PACIFIC:** Vivian Beaumont, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. **THE 39 STEPS:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. Through Jan. 10. **THE UNDERSTUDY:** Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300. **WEST SIDE STORY:** Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-239-6200. **WICKED:** Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-239-6200. **WISHFUL DRINKING:** Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300. **ZERO HOUR:** Theatre at St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. 212-279-4200.

NIGHT LIFE

ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL

237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Jan. 7: **Project/Object** is a quartet led by the Frank Zappa enthusiast Andre Cholmondeley which includes faculty from the School of Rock. The group, which pays tribute to the maestro and manages his complex rhythmic and harmonic changes with élan, has two special guests for this show, Ike Willis and Ray White. Two of Zappa's greatest sidemen, the pair are playing together for the first time in twenty-five years. Willis, who played the lead in Zappa's dark 1979 Orwellian opera, "Joe's Garage," played and recorded with the iconoclastic composer on and off until his last tour, in 1988. White started with Zappa in 1976 and accompanied him for eight years. Both men are excellent guitarists, and they had a notable vocal partnership when they toured together in Zappa's band in 1980 and 1984. Jan. 11: The legendary guitarist and Texas-blues maestro **Johnny Winter** returns to New York City. He'll be flanked by the Memphis soul man and Stax Records star **William Bell** and the guitarist **G. E. Smith,** who is most best known as the long-term music director of "Saturday Night Live" but is also a revered string-bender and session ace.

CITY WINERY

155 Varick St. (212-608-0555)—Jan. 8: The Sicily native **Carmen Consoli,** one of Italy's top-selling singer-songwriters, has a beautiful voice and passionate songs that need no translation.

GLASSLANDS GALLERY

289 Kent Ave., between S. 1st and S. 2nd Sts., Brooklyn (No phone)—Jan. 6: The Brooklyn noise-pop princess Cassie Ramone (née Grzymkowski), of the much-hyped Vivian Girls, has recently teamed with Kevin Morby, of Woods, Nate Stark, of Stupid Party, and Bossy's Justin Sullivan to form **Babies,** a scrappy group that slouches toward fuzz pop. With the Brooklyn acts **Total Slacker** and **Beach Fossils** on the bill, this show is a directory of the Brooklyn contingent of a sub-sub-genre with perhaps the most unfortunate appellation in music history: "shitgaze."

HIRO BALLROOM

371 W. 16th St. (866-468-7619)—Jan. 9: Mondo Mundo, a booking agency with an international bent, showcases its take on world music with a festival featuring **Ocote Soul Sounds, Toshi Reagon, Burkina Electric,** and **Abaji.**

JOE'S PUB

425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Jan. 11: The composer and multi-instrumentalist **Michael Hearst,** of One Ring Zero, trots out a few numbers from his latest solo project, "Songs for Unusual Creatures." The music is inspired by such animals as the cute Australian bilby and the Jules Verne-esque Magnapinna squid, and Hearst performs it in unusual company—his backing band includes robots. Jan. 12: The violist and composer Lev (Ljova) Zhurbin, who has collaborated with everyone from Yo-Yo Ma to Jay-Z, leads the ensemble **Ljova and the Kontraband** through a program of music with Argentinean influences. They'll be joined on this journey by the **Jofre Romarion New Tango Quartet.**

"LET'S ZYDECO"

Typically, one would have to travel to Breaux Bridge or Lafayette, Louisiana, to find the **Pine Leaf Boys,** a rocking Cajun band led by Wilson Savoy (the son of the living Cajun-music legends and accordion manufacturers Marc and Ann Savoy) but on Jan. 9, they'll be at Connolly's, an Irish pub in midtown with a fine wooden dance floor. (121 W. 45th St. For more information, visit www.letszydeco.com.)

MERCURY LOUNGE

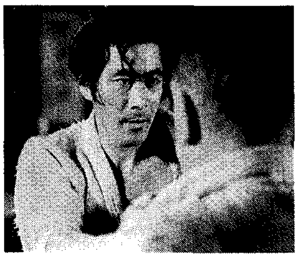
217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—Jan. 9: The **Rural Alberta Advantage,** a Canada-based indie-rock group with lyrics that focus on life in central and northern Alberta, performs songs from "Hometowns," its 2008 début record. The album was rereleased this past summer on Saddle Creek Records, the label founded by the Omaha ambassador (and Bright Eyes

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

PISTOL-WHIPPED

Even those who find Akira Kurosawa's work with his favored leading man, Toshiro Mifune, to be a touch overheated must admit that, when it comes to "Stray Dog" (1949), there is good reason for the heat. The film—which screens at Film Forum Jan. 6-14 as part of a four-week Kurosawa retrospective—shows Tokyo roasting in the aftermath of war, with morals and motives alike melting under the sun, and evil ripening like fruit. Women fan and dab themselves, men wipe their brows, and a young detective (Mifune) has his pistol lifted on a bus. His sense of responsibility deepens when the weapon falls into a killer's hands, and his quest for the criminal, through a city crowded with tea shops, chorus girls, and baseball games, in partnership with an older cop (Takashi Shimura), becomes an exasperating race. Some of the chases are as fast and pure as anything from silent cinema, but the final pursuit, with two men in ghostly white suits, neck-high in a field of flowers—first overheard by a pianist, then passed by singing children—is more of a breathless bad dream. (For anyone who craves more, the film is included in Criterion's new twenty-five-disk Kurosawa set.)

—*Anthony Lane*



TOHO COMPANY LTD./PHOTOFEST

front man) Conor Oberst. Nils Edenloff's syrupy-sweet and crackling voice strains in the upper register, reaching toward an earnestness born from crisp, cold nights on the open prairies. The group is joined by the beloved Brooklyn sextet the **Loom,** who have lately been guiding their chamber-folk sound to decidedly louder sonic territory. Jan. 10: The abrasive surf-punk of **Agent Orange,** West Coast underground stalwarts for the past thirty years. Jan. 11: **Hazmat Modine, One Ring Zero, Las Rubias Del Norte,** and the **Wingdale Community Singers.**

MUSIC HALL OF WILLIAMSBURG
66 N. 6th St., Brooklyn (718-486-5400)—Jan. 9: The Descendents remain one of the most influential and lasting pop-punk acts of the past three decades, but their spin-off, **All,** is unfairly neglected by critics and listeners alike. All was formed in the late eighties, when the bespectacled Descendents front man, Milo Aukerman, left to pursue a doctorate in biochemistry and the remaining members decided to continue bringing their quirky music to the masses. Jan. 12: The **Hot Rats,** a self-proclaimed "psychedelic punk" band, features the vocalist and guitarist Gaz Coombes and the drummer Danny Goffey (who are two-thirds of the nineties Britpop stars Supergrass). They've been laboring under the tutelage of the producer Nigel Godrich (a revered studio helmsman who has worked with Radiohead, Beck, and Paul McCartney), and their forthcoming album will include spirited cover versions of tunes by the Velvet Underground, the Sex Pistols, the Beastie Boys, and other acts.

TERMINAL 5
610 W. 56th St. (212-582-6600)—**Levon Helm,** the legendary drummer for the Band who regularly hosts "Midnight Ramble," a series of intimate concerts at his home and studio in Woodstock, heads into town on Jan. 7. A throat-cancer survivor, Helm lost his voice earlier this year, but he recently had a lesion removed from his vocal cords and he's slowly been easing back into singing. With the folk-rock outfit **Okkervil River.**

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL
59 W. 44th St. (212-840-6800)—Jan. 5-16: The pianist **Bill Charlap** and his mother, the singer **Sandy Stewart,** are equally devoted to the art of song, as they proved in their bracing 2005 collaborative album, "Love Is Here to Stay." Their new program, "Somebody Loves Me," spotlights tried-and-true classics—familiar, perhaps, but rendered perfectly.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Jan. 7-9: The violinist **Mark O'Connor** conjures up the spirit of Django-era Gallic swing, with expert assistance from the bassist **John Patitucci** and the guitarist **Julian Lage.** Jan. 10: The gifted songwriter **Nellie McKay** has been concentrating on classic tunes made famous by Doris Day; she recently released a Day tribute album, "Normal As Blueberry Pie." Jan. 11: The trombonist **Conrad Herwig** puts a Latin-jazz spin on the work of Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Herbie Hancock, and Wayne Shorter.

CAFÉ CARLYLE
Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—Jan. 5-30: The theatrical legend **Elaine Stritch** is in her eighties, but she's still a compelling no-holds-barred raconteur and a heartfelt performer. Her new program focusses on Stephen Sondheim, whose work lent Stritch a touch of immortality with such signature anthems as "The Ladies Who Lunch" and "I'm Still Here."

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Jan. 6-12: The **Clayton Brothers Band.** The saxophonist **Jeff Clayton** and his bassist brother, **John,** remain smitten with the vigor and bite of well-organized hard bop. Their band retains a dependable presence in the trumpeter **Terell Stafford.**

HIGHLINE BALLROOM
431 W. 16th St. (212-414-5994)—Jan. 8: The pianist **McCoy Tyner** and the saxophonist **Gary Bartz** have been moving in and out of each other's musical orbits since, at least, the 1968 release of Tyner's landmark album "Expansions." Here, Bartz joins Tyner's trio as guest soloist.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Jan. 6-10: The saxophonist **Ravi Coltrane,** working with a tight-knit unit fortified by the pianist **Luis Perdomo,** has overcome the weighty expectations imposed by his family name and established himself as a force to be heard.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Jan. 5-10: **Chris Potter's Underground.** Stepping out on his own, the in-demand saxophonist Potter convenes his bassless group featuring **Adam Rogers,** on guitar, **Craig Taborn,** on electric piano, and **Nate Smith,** on drums.

WINTER JAZZFEST
This ambitious five-venue festival brings together a slew of newish names with a smattering of noteworthy favorites. Highlights include performances by **Darcy James Argue's Secret Society, Jenny Scheinman** and **Jason Moran, Linda Oh, Lionel Loueke, Rudresh Mahanthappa's** Indo-Pak Coalition, the **Nicholas Payton SeXXXtet,** and the **Vijay Iyer** trio. (Jan. 8-9. For a complete schedule, visit www.winterjazzfest.com.)

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Velázquez Rediscovered."** Through Feb. 7. ♦ **"Art of the Samurai: Japanese Arms and Armor, 1156-1868."** Through Jan. 10. ♦ **"American Stories: Paintings of Everyday Life, 1765-1915."** Through Jan. 24. ♦ **"Sounding the Pacific: Musical Instruments of Oceania."** Through Sept. 6. ♦ **"Peaceful Conquerors: Jain Manuscript Painting."** Through March 21. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Gabriel Orozco."** Through March 1. ♦ **"Bauhaus 1919-1933: Workshops for Modernity."** Through Jan. 25. ♦ **"Tim Burton."** Through April 26. ♦ **"Monet's Water Lilies."** Through April 12. ♦ **"New Photography 2009: Walead Beshty, Daniel Gordon, Leslie Hewitt, Carter Mull, Sterling Ruby, Sara VanDerBeek."** Through Jan. 11. ♦ **"Performance 7: Mirage by Joan Jonas."** Through May 31. ♦ **"The New Typography."** Through July 12. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

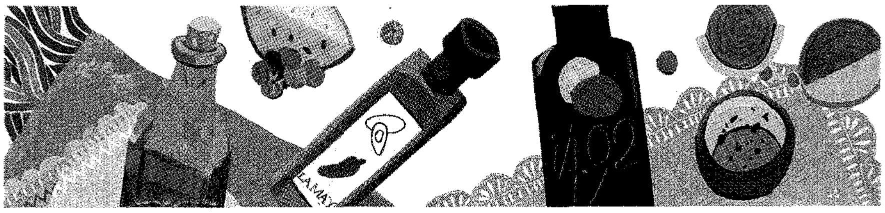
GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Kandinsky."** Through Jan. 13. ♦ **"Anish Kapoor: Memory."** Through March 28. (Open Fridays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Saturday evenings until 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3600)—**"Roni Horn aka Roni Horn."** Through Jan. 24. ♦ **"Georgia O'Keeffe: Abstraction."** Through Jan. 17. ♦ **"Omer Fast: Nostalgia."** Through Feb. 14. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Who Shot Rock & Roll: A Photographic History, 1955 to the Present."** Through Jan. 31. ♦ **"James Tissot: 'The Life of Christ.'"** Through Jan. 17. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Traveling the Silk Road: Ancient Pathway to the Modern World."** Through Aug. 15. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM
45 W. 53rd St. (212-265-1040)—**"Up Close: Henry Darger and the Coloring Book."** Through Sept.



JUSTIN GABBARD

ON AND OFF THE AVENUE
PURO, CHILE

221 Centre St. (212-925-7876)—In between Chinatown and Little Italy sits almost three thousand square feet of Chile. Puro, Chile is dedicated to promoting high-end Chilean handicrafts, groceries, and wines. A Chilean architect designed the super-stylish storefront of glass, wood, and stone, which feels more like the unfurnished lobby of a boutique hotel in Big Sur than a bodega that carries, among other things, endless varieties of olive oil. Do you want to sample the avocado oil infused with basil? Or perhaps pepped up with *merken,* a blend of spicy hot chili flakes and coriander? "This is fruity and soft, but my palate takes me somewhere else," said a customer from Washington, D.C., bread-mopping up several triglycerides on the tasting table until she settled on 1492, an olive oil whose savor she described as "buttery at first, and then a splash of pepper kicks in" ($11 for 8.7 ounces).

In addition to the alcove of oils, there are specialty foods like murtilla chutney, rosehip jam, and jars of *carica,* a type of papaya found only in Chile ($7.99; $6.99, $5.50). The weighty chocolate-brown pottery is handsome and astonishingly well-priced—$59.99 for a set that includes two square bowls, a medium rectangular serving dish, and a large oval crock. There are luxurious alpaca bed coverings and scarves made from wool tangled with colorful textile scraps ($70-$240; $38). But it was the jewelry, made predominantly from horsehair, cow horn, silver, and straw, that wowed me. I liked the long necklace of finely woven horsehair disks rimmed with semicircles of silver ($450); the chunky drop-shaped *boleadora* pendants of textured copper on long chains, a take on the weapons that were used by gauchos to hunt game ($260); the cow-horn-and-silver cuffs ($180); and the vibrantly colored horsehair brooches that look like flattened berets ($40). You may not be familiar with these products, but once you make their acquaintance, you'll want to jet down to Santiago, pronto. Fortuitously, there will be computer terminals on site where an in-store travel adviser will help you book a vacation. But don't forget the wines—more than two hundred labels, including some rarely available in this country, like Matetic and Odfjell (all wines $8.25-$105). For $20, you can't go wrong with the 2005 Maquis Lien, a blend of Rhone reds heralded by an enthusiastic customer as "Chile in a bottle." Length of bottle: one foot. Length of Chile (longest country in the world): two thousand seven hundred miles.

—*Patricia Marx*

13. ♦ **“Thomas Chambers (1808-1869): American Marine and Landscape Painter.”** Through March 7. ♦ **“Approaching Abstraction.”** Through Sept. 6. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 7:30.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**“Watteau to Degas: French Drawings from the Frits Lugt Collection.”** Through Jan. 10. ♦ **“Exuberant Grotesques: Renaissance Maiolica from the Fontana Workshop.”** Through Jan. 17. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

GREY ART GALLERY
100 Washington Sq. E. (212-998-6780)—**“Downtown Pix: Mining the Fales Archives, 1961-1991.”** Opens Jan. 12. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 11 to 6, Saturdays, 11 to 5, and Wednesday evenings until 8.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—**“Dress Codes: The Third ICP Triennial of Photography and Video.”** Through Jan. 17. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

JAPAN SOCIETY
333 E. 47th St. (212-832-1155)—**“Serizawa: Master of Japanese Textile Design.”** Through Jan. 17. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 11 to 6, Fridays, 11 to 9, and weekends, 11 to 5.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**“Alias Man Ray: The Art of Reinvention.”** Through March 14. ♦ **“Reinventing Ritual: Contemporary Art and Design for Jewish Life.”** Through Feb. 7. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, 11 to 5:45, Thursdays, 11 to 8, and Fridays, 11 to 4.)

MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**“A Woman’s Wit: Jane Austen’s Life and Legacy.”** Through March 14. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

MUSEUM OF ARTS AND DESIGN
2 Columbus Circle (212-299-7777)—**“Read My Pins: The Madeleine Albright Collection.”** Through Jan. 31. ♦ **“Slash: Paper Under the Knife.”** Through April 4. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Fifth Ave. at 103rd St. (212-534-1672)—**“Eero Saarinen: Shaping the Future.”** Through Jan. 31. ♦ **“Legacy: The Preservation of Wilderness in New York City.”** Through March 21. ♦ **“Only in New York: Photographs from *Look* Magazine.”** Through Jan. 18. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN
1 Bowling Green (212-514-3700)—**“A Song for the Horse Nation.”** Through July 7. (Open daily, 10 to 5, and Thursday evenings until 8.)

NEW MUSEUM
235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—**“Urs Fischer: Marguerite de Ponty.”** Through Feb. 7. ♦ **“Nikhil Chopra: Yog Raj Chitrakar, Memory Drawing IX.”** Through Feb. 14. (Open Wednesdays and weekends, noon to 6, and Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 10.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**“1969.”** Through April 5. ♦ **“Between Spaces.”** Through April 5. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

QUEENS MUSEUM OF ART
Flushing Meadows–Corona Park (718-592-9700)—**“Duke Riley: Those About to Die Salute You.”** Riley first made a splash in 2007, when he steered a homemade replica of a Revolutionary War-era oak submarine too close to the Queen Mary 2. This show arrives in the wake of a mock naval battle staged by Riley last August in a reflecting pool adjacent to the museum; it documents the spectacle with a diorama, props, and a video. The modernist credo “truth to materials” gets a new twist in a black-and-white etching of the event, on paper made from the same reeds, harvested in Flushing Meadows–Corona Park, that were used to build boats for the battle. But, like a Niagara Falls spoon, the show holds less interest than what it commemorates. Through March 13. ♦ **“O Zhang: Cutting the Blaze to New Frontiers.”** Through March 13. ♦ **“Daniel Bozhkov: Republic of Perpetual Reconstitution and Rebuild.”** Through March 13. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, noon to 5.)

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—**“The Red Book of C. G. Jung.”** Through Jan. 25. ♦ **“Victorious Ones: Jain Images of Perfection.”** Through Feb. 15. (Open Mondays and Thursdays, 11 to 5, Wednesdays, 11 to 7, Fridays, 11 to 10, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

SCULPTURECENTER
44-19 Purves St., Long Island City (718-361-1750)—**“Leopards in the Temple.”** Opens Jan. 10. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 11 to 6.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—**“30 Seconds Off an Inch.”** Through March 14. ♦ **“Wardell Milan: Drawings of Harlem.”** Through March 14. ♦ **“A Delicate Touch: Watercolors from the Permanent Collection.”** Through March 14. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6, and Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

FERENC BERKO
Berko (1916-2000), born in Hungary, was brought up in Germany, and spent many years shuttling between Europe, India, and America before settling in Aspen. His peripatetic life is reflected in this show of photographs, made between 1933 and 1951, when he refined his distinctly modernist vision. Berko’s work is at once warm and cool, most apparent in a wall of nude studies of his wife, Mirte, in which artiness never entirely muffles eroticism. The early influence of László Moholy-Nagy crops up repeatedly in skewed Bauhaus-style compositions of architectural details, but these handsome images get serious competition in his photographs of India, where an almost dizzying vivaciousness overwhelms all sense of formalist cool. Through Jan. 23. (Gitterman, 170 E. 75th St. 212-734-0868.)

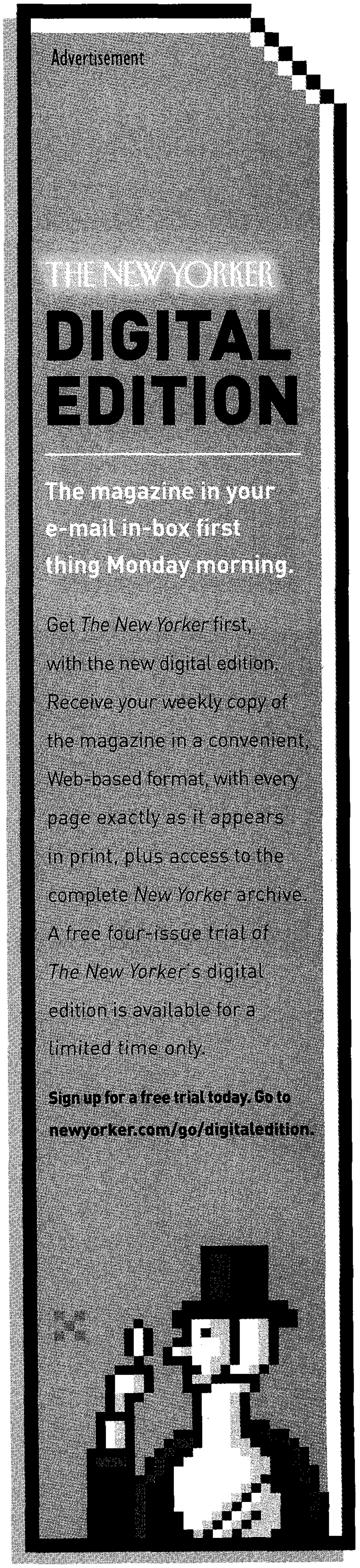
Short List

RAY PARKER: Washburn, 20 W. 57th St. 212-397-6780. Through Jan. 9. **FRANCIS PICABIA / FAIRFIELD PORTER:** De Nagy, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-262-5050. Through Jan. 23. **GERHARD RICHTER:** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160. Through Jan. 9. **"THE ORIGINS OF EL GRECO: ICON PAINTING IN VENETIAN CRETE":** Onassis Cultural Center, 645 Fifth Ave., at 51st St. 212-486-4448. Through Feb. 27.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

CHRISTIAN HOLSTAD
Look closely at the deflated piles of vinyl on the floor, and their commonality becomes clear: they’re shopping carts, marked with familiar big-box names like Target, Costco, Home Depot, and Walmart. On the walls, collages complement the sculptures, depicting a motley assortment of objects—a bra, an empty toilet-paper roll, a broken umbrella, a bar of soap. If shopping is glamorized in other precincts, here it’s rendered not just mundane but life-draining. Holstadt’s show is more than a critique of the collapsing economy; he’s delving into the psychic abyss of consumer consciousness. Through Feb. 28. (Reich, 537A W. 23rd St. 212-924-4949.)

DAVID LEVINTHAL
Like the photographs that first got him noticed, from the 1977 series “Hitler Moves East,” Levinthal’s sensational new pictures are about war. In “I.E.D.,” the street-level conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan is evoked with toy figures of soldiers seen at close range but in soft focus, so details blur and atmosphere takes over. The results—in earthy, dust-storm colors and the eerie green glow of night-vision cameras—are



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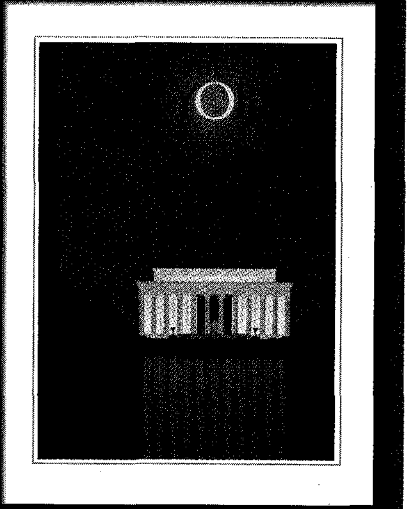
REFLECTION
by Bob Staake
Issue date: November 17, 2008



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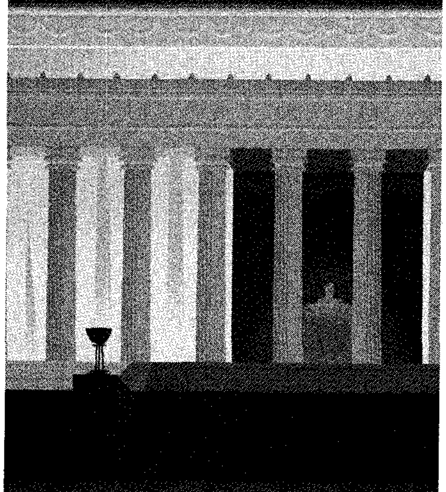

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more cinematic than photojournalistic, but they draw from both approaches to create a gnawing sense of tension. Levinthal is so practiced at this sort of make-believe that neither the work's apparent artifice nor its inflated scale can undermine its power to convince. His photographs plug into our image bank, feeding off memory, anxiety, and the sick thrill of war games. Through Jan. 30. (Holm, 524 W. 24th St. 212-627-7444.)

JON PYLYPCHUK
The show's title may be "The War," but don't expect a critical response to increased troops in Afghanistan. Pylypchuk's new sculptures have more in common with "Pee-wee's Playhouse" than with "Meet the Press." Two jumbled installations of goofy, mask-like objects face off on opposite walls. The works would evoke tribal relics, but in lieu of carving wood Pylypchuk spray-paints metal and insulation foam, and embellishes with light bulbs. A cerebral show this is not. But it might be the best place in Chelsea to bring the kids, especially those who'll enjoy seeing the likes of "Zit Face" square off against "Long Eyes Helmet Head." Through Jan. 30. (Petzel, 537 W. 22nd St. 212-680-9467.)

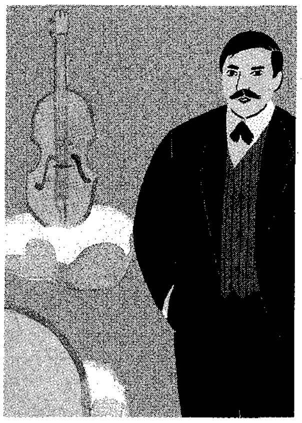
PAOLO VENTURA
"Winter Stories" continues Ventura's imaginary re-creation of prewar Italy, in photographs of wonderfully evocative sets and figures he constructs himself. Because every detail of these sites is meticulously realized, the work is as seductive as a magic act; you know it's all an elaborate fake, but you're enjoying it too much to locate the flaws. Ventura takes us to a small-town carnival, complete with sword-swallower, fire-eater, juggler, and clowns. The settings, with their pale, weathered color, may be dour—this fairy tale is grounded in some harsh reality—but marvellous things happen here, such as the appearance of a bird-headed man and the levitation of a balloon seller (note the snow on the soles of his shoes). Through Jan. 23. (Hasted Hunt Kraeutler, 537 W. 24th St. 212-627-0006.)

"HEADS"
This cleverly chosen group of photographs suggests the various ways artists deal with portraiture. In many instances here, they avoid direct confrontation with human subjects (and any suggestion that they can plumb the depths of people's souls) by photographing dolls, mannequins, paintings, or other representations. Arne Svenson brings us face to face with an unnervingly expressive forensic model of a child, based on skeletal remains, and Tanya Marcuse zeroes in on the seductive smile of a reclining wax figure. Other photographers—Valérie Belin, Gary Schneider, Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, Hellen van Meene—find ways to emphasize the shifting reality of the portrait with images of real people that slip into beguiling fictions. Through Jan. 9. (Saul, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-627-2410.)

Short List

DIANE ARBUS / WILLIAM EGGLESTON: Cheim & Read, 547 W. 25th St. 212-242-7727. Opens Jan. 7. **WALLACE BERMAN:** Klagsbrun, 526 W. 26th St. 212-243-3335. Through Jan. 9. **JOSEPH BEUYS:** Boone, 541 W. 24th St. 212-752-2929. Opens Jan. 9. **BRIAN CALVIN:** Kern, 532 W. 20th St. 212-367-9663. Through Jan. 16. **MARK DION / JEFFREY VALLANCE:** Bonakdar, 521 W. 21st St. 212-414-4144. Opens Jan. 9. **JOSEPHINE HALVORSON:** Rowe, 504 W. 22nd St. 212-255-5065. Through Jan. 16. **RICHARD HAWKINS:** Greene Naftali, 508 W. 26th St. 212-463-7770. Through Jan. 23. **SHARON LOCKHART:** Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300. Through Jan. 30. **ROBERT LONGO / DAVID MALJKOVIC / JOHN MILLER:** Metro Pictures, 519 W. 24th St. 212-206-7100. Through Jan. 30. **VIRGIL MARTI:** Dee, 545 W. 20th St. 212-924-7545. Opens Jan. 9. **"THE BRUCE HIGH QUALITY FOUNDATION UNIVERSITY":** Inglett, 522 W. 24th St. 212-647-9111. Through Jan. 23. **"IN NUMBERS: SERIAL PUBLICATIONS BY ARTISTS SINCE 1955":** X Initiative, 548 W. 22nd St. 917-697-4886. Through Jan. 30. **"JR. AND SON'S":** Feuer, 530 W. 24th St. 212-989-7700. Through Jan. 23. **"MORPHOLOGICAL MUTINY":** Nolan, 527 W. 29th St. 212-925-6190. Through Jan. 23. **"OUT OF ORDER":** Edlin, 134 Tenth Ave., at 18th St. 212-206-9723. Through Jan. 16.

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
PRINCE OF DARKNESS



GRANT SHAFFER

Though usually pegged as a conservative, the Swiss composer Othmar Schoeck (1886-1957) was, in fact, too original for his own good. In his finest songs, an "accessible" late-Romantic lyricism exists uneasily alongside an emotional intensity that can be as painfully personal as the confessional poetry of Lowell and Berryman. Heinz Holliger, the eminent oboist, credits Schoeck with creating "a whole new way of connecting words and music." It can be a hard journey, but the baritone Christian Gerhaher and the strings of the Rosamunde Quartet may have finally built a sturdy bridge with their radiant new ECM recording of the "Notturno" (1931-33), an expansive sequence of songs and instrumental interludes. After exploring the turbulent world of the poet Nikolaus Lenau, Schoeck concludes with a setting of a text by Gottfried Keller that glows with childlike innocence—though the music suggests a meeting of late Beethoven, Stravinsky, and American blues. It is one of the most astonishing moments in twentieth-century art.

—*Russell Platt*

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
The winter season, which will be dominated by full-evening-length ballets—an anomaly for the company—gets going with Balanchine's delightful "A Midsummer Night's Dream," from 1962. Balanchine divided the ballet in two, with the travails of the confused lovers—victims of Puck's mischief—and the surly tiff between the imperious fairies Titania and Oberon taking place in Act I, followed by a resplendent wedding divertissement set in the court of Theseus. The regal Teresa Reichlen is not to be missed in the role of Titania. Casts appear on the company's Web site a week in advance. ♦ Jan. 6 and Jan. 12 at 7:30, Jan. 7-8 at 8, Jan. 9 at 2, and Jan. 10 at 3: "A Midsummer Night's Dream." ♦ Jan. 9 at 8: "Naïve and Sentimental Music" and "Who Cares?" (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500. Through Feb. 28.)

PACIFIC NORTHWEST BALLET
At the Joyce, the company presents a lineup that includes two commissions by its artistic director, Peter Boal: "Opus 111," by Twyla Tharp, and "3 Movements," a large ensemble work by Benjamin Millepied. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Jan. 5-6 at 7:30, Jan. 7-8 at 8, Jan. 9 at 2 and 8, and Jan. 10 at 2.)

SOLEDAD BARRIO & NOCHE FLAMENCA
The Spanish troupe offers a new piece about the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, along with the solos of Antonio Jimenez and Juan Ogalla, and, above all, the *siguiriya* or *soleá* of the incomparable Soledad Barrio. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200. Jan. 6-7 and Jan. 12 at 8, Jan. 8 at 7 and 10, Jan. 9 at 5 and 8, and Jan. 10 at 5. Through Jan. 16.)

TERE O'CONNOR DANCE / PAM TANOWITZ
Dance Theatre Workshop continues its laudable habit of reprising worthy works from the previous season. "Wrought Iron Fog," in the vein of O'Connor's recent work, is like a digest of all dance, incongruously quilted together for maximum friction. It's an antic, chuckle-producing piece that couldn't be more serious about investigating the possibilities peculiar to dance. Tanowitz's "Be in the Gray with Me," entirely different in tone, is similarly rich in its mixing of styles. It's a particularly elegant production, glistening with intelligent detail. (219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. O'Connor: Jan. 7-8 at 6. Tanowitz: Jan. 10 at 7 and Jan. 11 at 9.)

WALLY CARDONA
Joyce SoHo brings back "A Light Conversation," a duet from 2008 that is remarkable for its ruminative quality. A radio panel discussion about Kierkegaard puts ideas in circulation, but the dancers, both performers of striking honesty and authority, stay mute. Amid the severe illumination and shadow of Roderick Murray's lighting, the two keep up a subtle bodily dialogue, tête-à-tête, heart to heart. (155 Mercer St. 212-352-3101. Jan. 7-9 at 8, Jan. 10 at 3, and Jan. 11-12 at 8.)

"DANSPACE UNPLUGGED"
This time of year, local choreographers hawk their wares to visiting members of the Association of Performing Arts Presenters. Danspace Project opens some of the showings to the public, giving local dancegoers a chance to catch excerpts of shows they might have missed. Heidi Latsky, Deganit Shemy, and Netta Yerushalmy share the first program; Kyle Abraham, Wally Cardona, and John Jasperse divide the second; Julian Barnett, David Dorfman, and Pam Tanowitz make up the last. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111. Jan. 7-9 at 8.)

ERICK HAWKINS CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION
Perhaps best remembered as Martha Graham's lover—and, later, husband—and the inspiration for "Appalachian Spring" and "Night Journey," Hawkins was also a choreographer of note who developed a highly personal style, influenced by Eastern philosophy. The 92nd Street Y will celebrate the centenary of his birth—he died in 1994—with a weekend of events, including performances by the Erick Hawkins Dance Company (directed by Katherine Duke) and by choreographers influenced by his ideas, including Susan Cherniak, Mariko Tanabe, and Catherine Tharin. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Jan. 8-10.)

JAPAN SOCIETY CONTEMPORARY DANCE SHOWCASE
The annual sampler, a fixture on the dance calendar, offers a unique window onto the scene across the Pacific, even if the view is often disappointingly familiar. This year is heavy on whimsy. The piece "Omedeto," by the company Kikikikikiki, is a typical exercise in one branch of Butoh, a group portrait of the cutely insane. "Slap, Pat, Suck," a knockabout duet by Masako Yasumoto, is a representative selection of those action verbs. "Another Story," by Company Derashinera, draws on mime for its surreal slapstick. From South Korea comes LDP, an all-male, blazer-wearing hip-hop crew, whose "No Comment" is forceful in mass and thin on invention. Taiwan's WenChung Lin, best known here as a dancer for Bill T. Jones, trusts his company with a subtler, more understated work, "Small Songs." (Japan Society, 333 E. 47th St. 212-715-1258. Jan. 8-9 at 7:30.)

DANCE GOTHAM
In its fourth yearly festival, Dance Gotham presents intimate pieces by introspective artists like Kate Weare (Saturday) along with more politically minded works by the likes of Camille A. Brown (Friday), as well as a welcome dose of sharp wit from Larry Keigwin (Saturday). For a full schedule, visit www.gothamarts.org. (Skirball Center, 566 LaGuardia Pl. 212-352-3101. Jan. 8-9 at 8 and Jan. 10 at 7.)

"STAM-PEDE"
Darrah Carr's percussive dance festival promises to deliver variety. Just about everything is covered: Irish dance (Carr), flamenco (Maya de Silva), kathak (Parul Shah), "Stomp"-style found-object work (Buckets and Tap Shoes), and classic tap, as well as such idiosyncratic creations as the camp of David Parker and the Rumbatap of Max Pollak. Even in the traditional forms, the emphasis—for better and worse—is on contemporary blends. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Jan. 10 at 3.)

"WORKS & PROCESS: FREDERIC FRANKLIN"
At the age of ninety-five, Franklin has worked with, partnered, and performed choreography by just about everybody who was anybody in twentieth-century ballet. "Works & Process" pays tribute to this ballet survivor, and to his mischievous temperament, in an evening of dances from "Raymonda," "Sleeping Beauty," and "Giselle," performed by members of A.B.T. Jan. 10 is a benefit with steep ticket prices, but Jan. 11 is a regular performance, so book early. (Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 212-423-3587. Jan. 10 at 7 and Jan. 11 at 7:30.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
Edo de Waart, replacing James Levine, conducts the January performances of **"Der Rosenkavalier."** The cast—which includes Renée Fleming, Susan Graham, Christine Schäfer, and Kristinn Sigmundsson—could hardly be bettered. (Jan. 6 at 7:30 and Jan. 9 at 1.) ♦ Another house favorite, the spectacular Zeffirelli production of Puccini's **"Turandot,"** returns, with Maria Guleghina, Maija Kovalevska, Philip Webb, and Hao Jiang Tian; Andris Nelsons conducts. (Jan. 7 at 8.) ♦ With Lise Lindstrom replacing Guleghina and Salvatore Licitra replacing Webb. (Jan. 9 at 8:30.) ♦ After the Met's successful new productions of "Tales of Hoffmann" and "From the House of the Dead," the fiasco that was the opening-night "Tosca" is fading from memory. Next up is a new production of **"Carmen"** by the distinguished British director Richard Eyre, whose Broadway and film work has made him familiar to New York audiences. (It's high time: the Zeffirelli production has long been an embarrassment.) The company is lavishing talent on the première run; the first performances feature Elīna Garanča (in the title role), Barbara Frittoli, Roberto Alagna, and Mariusz Kwiecien, conducted by the dynamic young Canadian maestro Yannick Nézet-Séguin. (Jan. 8 and Jan. 12 at 8.) ♦ Verdi's **"Stiffelio"** has an important place in Met history. The opera, cut to ribbons by the censors before the 1850 première in Trieste (like "La Traviata," it had a "modern" plot), had its first complete performance at the house in 1993. Back then,

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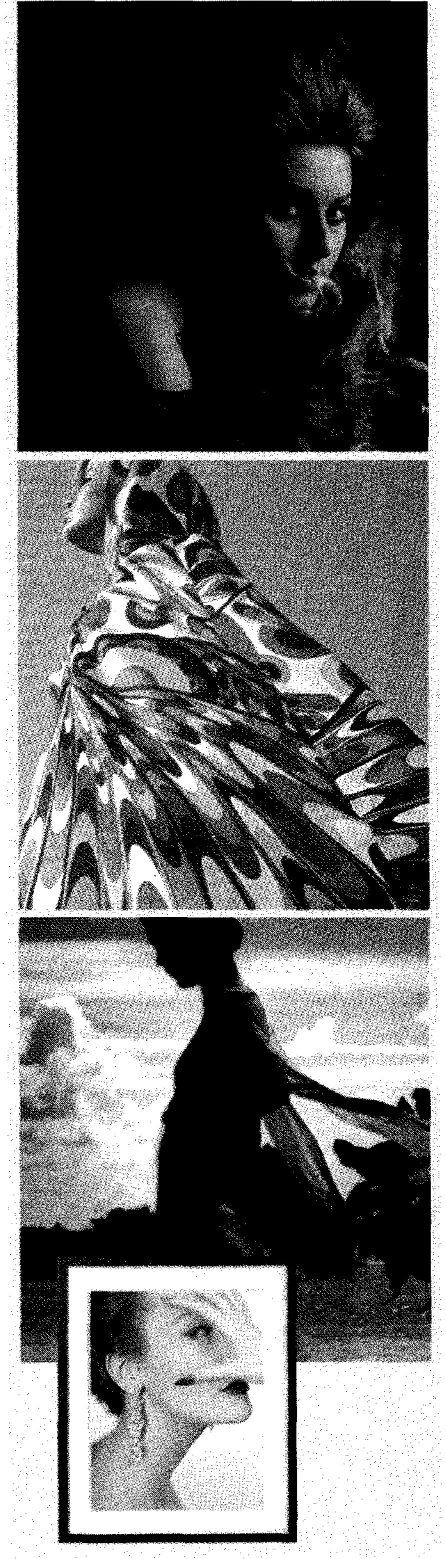

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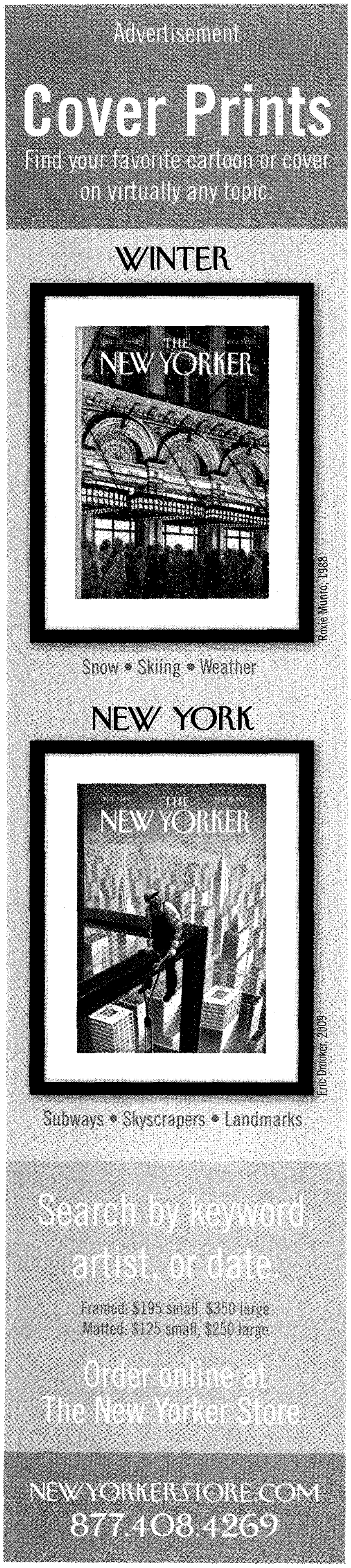

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Plácido Domingo took the title role, that of an Austrian Protestant preacher who struggles with his wife's infidelity; now José Cura sings the lead, with Domingo conducting. Also with the impressive Sondra Radvanovsky, Andrzej Dobber, and Philip Ens. (Jan. 11 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

BLEECKER STREET OPERA: "THE BARBER OF SEVILLE"
The hardy, rough-and-ready ethos of the old Amato Opera had its charm, but its limitations became clear as the decades went by. Bleecker Street, one of two companies formed by former Amato personnel, has fostered a more professional standard of performance; its production of Rossini's immortal comedy is directed by Teresa K. Pond and conducted by David Rosenmeyer, the associate conductor of the Oratorio Society of New York. (45 Bleecker Street Theatre. 212-239-6200. Jan. 9 at 3 and Jan. 10 at 7.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
Alan Gilbert and his orchestra begin the year with a program mixing two Russian flavors: the whiplash satire of Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No. 2 (with Yefim Bronfman) and the lush late Romanticism of Rachmaninoff's Second Symphony. (Jan. 7 and Jan. 12 at 7:30 and Jan. 8 at 8. Note: For information about "Musical Supper," offered after the Jan. 8 concert, see Above and Beyond.) ♦ Gilbert also conducts the Rachmaninoff in an intermissionless "Rush Hour" concert. (Jan. 6 at 6:45.) (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656.)

RECITALS

AVIAN ORCHESTRA
In "Chamber Rock for the Twenty-first Century," the freewheeling downtown collective offers an evening devoted to genre-crossing music by Michael Gandolfi, Conrad Cummings, and Peter Flint ("Fantastic Music for a Fabulous Time"), among others. (The Cell, 338 W. 23rd St. www.avianmusic.tix.com. Jan. 6 at 8.)

GENE PRITSKER'S "SOUND LIBERATION"
Pritsker, a rule-breaking composer-guitarist (and rapper) who impresses funk and rock beats onto classical structures, fronts this eclectic jazz-type combo of singers and instrumentalists in a selection of pieces from their most recent album, "Open Up Your Ears and Get Some," at (Le) Poisson Rouge. (158 Bleecker St. www.lprnyc.com. Jan. 6 at 10.)

MUSIC AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM: "ANTHONY MCGILL & FRIENDS"
McGill, who gained national prominence when he performed at the Inauguration of President Obama, joins the soprano Monica Yunus, the bass-baritone Terry Cook, and the pianist Caroline Stoessinger in a program of duos and trios by Schubert ("Shepherd on the Rock"), Schumann (including "Dichterliebe"), and Mozart (excerpts from "Don Giovanni" and "The Magic Flute"). (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949. Jan. 9 at 7.)

SIMONE DINNERSTEIN AND ACME
The contemplative Brooklyn pianist joins members of the American Contemporary Music Ensemble, who, in a backward glance, accompany her in Bach's Keyboard Concerto in F Minor and selections from Dvořák's Piano Quintet; music by Phil Kline completes the program. (P.S. 321 Auditorium, 180 Seventh Ave., Brooklyn. www.ps321.org. Jan. 10 at 2.)

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC ENSEMBLES
Members of the orchestra—including the violinist Anna Rabinova and the cellist Eric Bartlett—perform music by Mozart (the Sonata for Violin and Bass in F Major), Piston, Turina (the Piano Trio No. 1), and David Winkler. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-201-3330. Jan. 10 at 3.)

MET CHAMBER ENSEMBLE
There's a bizarro-world changeup at the close of James Levine's latest concert with his expert little band. After performances of two of American modernism's hardest nuts—Babbitt's "The Head of the Bed" and Carter's "Syringa"—comes a shameless dollop of cream, Strauss's suite from

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TABLES FOR TWO
JOSEPH LEONARD

170 Waverly Pl. (646-429-8383)—This new restaurant takes the pose of a shabby-chic apartment: it's furnished with distressed bookshelves stocked with weathered volumes, a vintage typewriter, a blue seltzer bottle, and beat-up suitcases with stickers from "Villa Medici—Roma." A mirrored medicine cabinet in the bathroom holds paper towels, tampons, Altoids, Q-tips, cotton balls, baby powder, lotion, and toothpicks. It's Village bohemian meets Anthropologie catalogue. The tiny room, hardly bigger than a West Fourth Street studio, has perhaps a dozen seats at the bar and only a handful of tables. The owner, Gabriel Stulman, once ran the Little Owl, and, as at that restaurant, the demand entirely exceeds capacity. The difference is that Joseph Leonard doesn't take reservations, and trying to hang around inside means spending upward of an hour being gently shoved out of the way by the waitresses.

Stulman has billed the place as "an American brasserie," which means that the menu offers French-leaning classics: pâté, duck rillettes, mussels and fries. But there's also shrimp and grits (though you could easily mistake the creamy cornmeal for something more French than Southern) and autumn stuffing, which has deep notes of sage and squash. The meat on the menu is uniformly excellent: steak au poivre, with a nicely seared pepper crust and a tender center, over thin disks of buttery potatoes; braised pork hock, intensely piggy but with the crispy exterior of fried chicken, and offset with a heap of spicy arugula; tender bœuf bourguignonne that separates easily into richly flavored hunks. For comfort food, it would be difficult to do much better than the "soggy toast": a slab of bread, smothered in oyster mushrooms and pan juices, topped with a poached egg.

The dependability of the menu seems to have drawn a number of regulars, even while the restaurant has maintained its opening buzz, attracting equal measures of Wall Street foodies, sleek young women ("I normally only order salads," one nervously assured her date when a dish of octopus arrived), and the self-consciously dishevelled. In contrast to the well-executed, stolid food, the atmosphere has a somewhat affected insouciance, from the soundtrack of Jay-Z and Eminem to the oversized line drawing of a leering old man. Outside, a small blackboard offers strenuously saucy come-ons: "Joseph Leonard welcomes you AND YOUR WITTY COMEBACKS so bring it on you sassy minx!!!" (Open Tuesdays through Fridays for breakfast, lunch, and dinner and weekends for brunch and dinner. Entrées $14-$27.)

—*Andrea Thompson*

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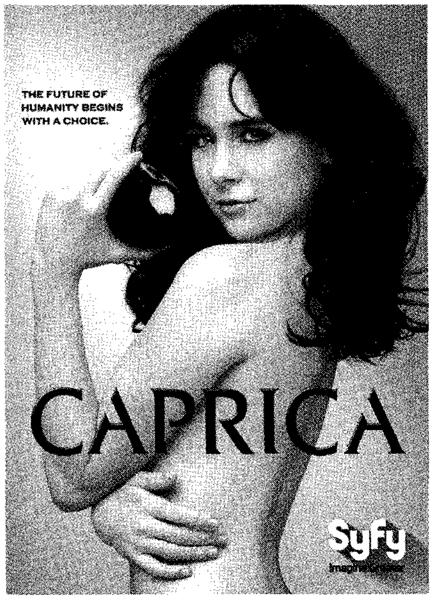
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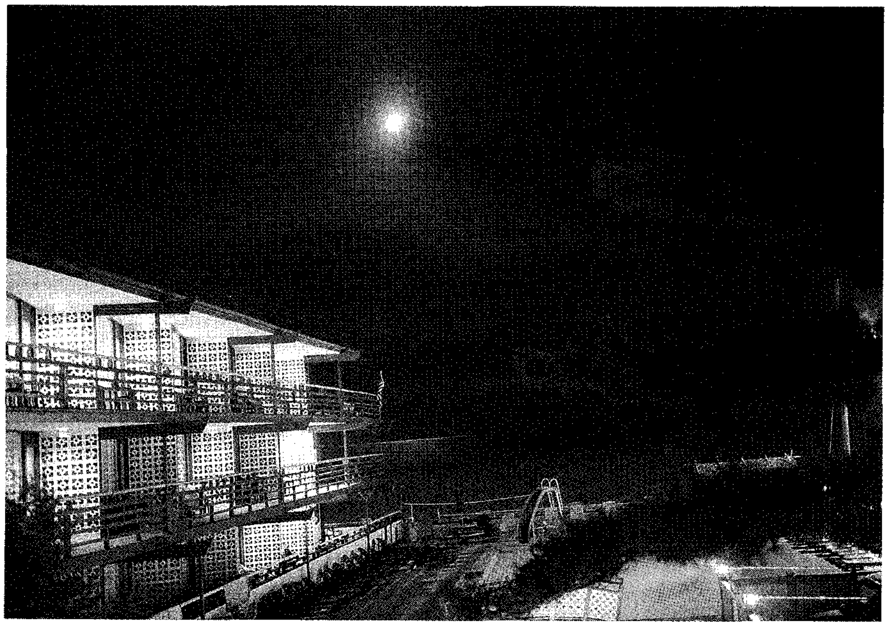
his incidental music to Molière's "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme." (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. Jan. 10 at 5.)

AMERICA-ISRAEL CULTURAL FOUNDATION SEVENTIETH-ANNIVERSARY RECITAL
A clutch of renowned musicians—including the pianists Yefim Bronfman and Shai Wosner, the clarinettist Alexander Fiterstein, and the violinists Pinchas Zukerman, Miriam Fried, and Shlomo Mintz—gather for a celebratory concert that features music by Mendelssohn (the Octet), Schumann (the Piano Quintet), Mozart, and Schubert (the String Quintet). (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Jan. 10 at 7.)

"HILARY HAHN'S BACH PARTY"
The magnetic violinist, who is always expanding her horizons, joins special guests at (Le) Poisson Rouge to mark her latest release, an album exploring the great duets for violin and voice that Bach sprinkled throughout his religious works. (158 Bleecker St. www.lprnyc.com. Jan. 12 at 7:30.)

ANDREAS STAIER
In an addendum to the Haydn anniversary year, the acclaimed fortepianist plays a clutch of the composer's beguiling solo sonatas (including the Sonata No. 52 in E-Flat Major), along with the Variations in F Minor. (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. Jan. 12 at 7:30.)



"Untitled (Motel, Wildwood, New Jersey)," by William Eggleston, at Cheim & Read.

YOUNG CONCERT ARTISTS SERIES: RAY CHEN
The 2009 Queen Elisabeth of Belgium International Violin Competition prize is the latest award garnered by this outstanding young performer, who makes his New York recital début at Merkin Hall with music by Tartini (the "Devil's Trill" Sonata), Franck, Bach (the Chaconne), and Wieniawski. (129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. Jan. 12 at 7:30.)

MOVIES OPENING

DAYBREAKERS
A futuristic thriller, about a scientist who attempts to save the world from a vampire-borne plague. Directed by Peter and Michael Spierig; starring Ethan Hawke, Willem Dafoe, and Sam Neill. Opening Jan. 8. (In wide release.)

FLOODING WITH LOVE FOR THE KID
Zachary Oberzan directed and stars in this one-man, one-room adaptation of an action novel. Opening Jan. 8. (Anthology Film Archives.)

LEAP YEAR
A romantic comedy, starring Amy Adams as a Boston woman who follows her boyfriend (Adam Scott) to Ireland, in order to propose to him. Directed by Anand Tucker; co-starring John Lithgow and Matthew Goode. Opening Jan. 8. (In wide release.)

SWEETGRASS
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Jan. 6. (Film Forum.)

YOUTH IN REVOLT
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Jan. 8. (In wide release.)

NOW PLAYING

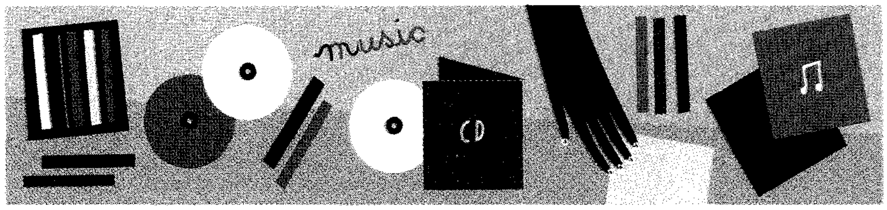
AVATAR
As James Cameron, working in 3-D, thrusts us into the picture frame, brushing past tree branches, coursing alongside foaming-jawed creatures, we may be overcome by an uncanny sense of emerging, becoming, transcending—a sustained mood of elation produced by vaulting into space. This is the most physically beautiful American film in years. It's set on Pandora, a verdant moon, a hundred and fifty years from now, where the long-waisted, translucent-blue Na'vi live on turf that contains an energy-rich mineral that an American corporation, armed to the teeth with military contractors, wants to harvest. An ex-Marine (Sam Worthington) in the shape of a Na'vi—an avatar—is sent to spy, but he falls in love with a warrior princess (Zoë Saldana), and he winds up leading a defense of the Na'vi against the armed might of the military. It's the old story of Pocahontas and John Smith, mixed, perhaps, with "Dances with Wolves." The Na'vi, who are connected by neural networks to all living things, are meant to remind us of Native Americans; the military is meant to remind us of the shock-and-awe Bush Administration militarists. The story may be trite, but Cameron creates an entire world, including magnificent flying pterodactyls and a bright-red flying monster with jaws that could snap an oak. The movie is as much a vertical as a horizontal experience; its many parts cohere and flow together. With Sigourney Weaver as a high-minded biologist, Stephen Lang as a testosterone-pumped military leader, and Giovanni Ribisi as the cynical head of the corporate expedition.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 1/4/10.) (In wide release.)

CRAZY HEART
Jeff Bridges is Bad Blake, a well-travelled country singer and a barely functioning mess with a ratty beard and ponytail, a large belly, and a constant cigarette and glass of bourbon. He drives alone through vast stretches of the Southwest, drifting from saloon to bowling alley, performing with ragged pickup bands. He can still sing and play, a little, though he may not make it through a set without heaving in an alley. The rest of the time he lies on his back in a squalid motel. Bridges luxuriates in indolence, though, unlike the sublime Dude in "The Big Lebowski," Bad is not pleased with himself; there's an irritable pride churning around inside the man. Maggie Gyllenhaal, ardent and looking great, turns up as Jean Craddock, an arts journalist and single mother who penetrates the gloom of Bad's motel room for an interview. Jean wakes up the decrepit singer, but this is not a movie about miracles (the general theme of Bad's songs is "Everything is screwed up, but nothing can be done about it"). Nor is the movie quite a miracle itself. It has an easy, unforced rhythm, yet it needs more plot, more complication, more conflict. Written and directed by Scott Cooper, from Thomas Cobb's novel.—*D.D.* (12/14/09) (In limited release.)

THE CRY OF JAZZ
Edward O. Bland's filmmaking skills aren't much better than Ed Wood's, but his insights into the art and politics of jazz—as seen in this short work of philosophical agitprop, from 1959—are profound. His film opens with a party at which white jazz enthusiasts ask questions about the music and their black friends answer. This framework gives way to the director's essay-like narration, in which he defines jazz in terms of African-American experience, relates its form and sound to its political implications, and, remarkably, predicts both the aesthetic of free jazz and the music's role in the civil-rights movement. Filmed performances of the Chicago-based visionary Sun Ra and his band (notably the great saxophonist John Gilmore) illustrate Bland's theses and arouse the director's keenest visual engagement. The ideas are debatable, but they're also stimulating; the movie, which is as heartfelt as it is analytical, suggests a new dimension in music criticism.—*Richard Brody* (Maysles Cinema; Jan. 7.)

THE ECLIPSE
For all the apparent opacity of Michelangelo Antonioni's modernist melodrama, from 1962, its theme is clear: the conditioning and deformation of emotional life by modern architecture and urban planning. The love story between Vittoria (Monica Vitti), a sleek, feral translator with leftist leanings, and Piero (Alain Delon, dubbed into Italian), a dynamic, cavalier young stockbroker, appears—under the pressure of Antonioni's rigorous pictorial schema—as a tensely choreographed ritual of incomprehension and frustration. A brilliant sequence at the Rome stock exchange puts into action the aggression and abstraction that contemporary life runs on and sublimates, but the emotional life of the movie is in the sudden, anti-romantic shifts of mood that erupt from the bare spaces and sharp edges of the reconfigured city. These exemplary citizens of technocracy make no world of their own and merely respond to the stimuli of their programmed environment: abstract paintings, intellectual journals, electric razors, and a derisively swivelling table fan reflect their starkly mechanistic inner lives. Meanwhile, the changing world brings out their worst instincts: Vittoria does a strange and offensive blackface dance that suggests both a craving for unencumbered, primal release and a mimetic pathos that takes the place of thought. In Italian.—*R.B.* (Rubin Museum of Art; Jan. 8.)

THE IMAGINARIUM OF DR. PARNASSUS
A travelling theatre rolls through modern London, inviting citizens to step up and share in its wonders; nobody orchestrates a blast from the past quite like Terry Gilliam. His new film stars Christopher Plummer as the eponymous doctor, who claims immortality and has entered into a pact with the Devil (Tom Waits), although, as often with Gilliam, the fine print of the story feels elusive. Parnassus is both Faust and Prospero—he even has a half-obedient, adoring daughter (Lily Cole), plus a diminutive sprite (Verne Troyer), to complete the picture. The film makes the least impact when it aims for maximum strangeness (the dreamworlds into which the theatre's customers are plunged are no more than the fruits of a wandering fancy), whereas its everyday setting, beside the Thames, has a sad, valedictory grit that is hard to shake off. With Johnny Depp, Colin Farrell, Jude Law, and the



POP NOTES
WHAT COMES NEXT

Year-end roundups tend to look backward, but if there's one thing recent music history has taught us it's that there's not much recent music history. These past twelve months have brought further evidence of Balkanization in the pop market, and consensus is rarer than ever; two of the top-selling albums of 2009 were an unmemorable Eminem release and the début by the TV phenomenon Susan Boyle. So will the future save the past? Here are the albums we're eagerly awaiting in early 2010.

Freedy Johnston, **"Rain on the City"** (Bar/None, Jan. 12)—Johnston was one of the premier singer-songwriters of the nineties, but he hasn't released an album for eight years. This long-delayed set of songs (he scrapped the album twice before completing it) returns him to his finely wrought, melancholy character studies. He plays City Winery on Jan. 19.

Burkina Electric, **"Paspanga"** (Cantaloupe Music, Jan. 12)—The début full-length album by this multi-continental group, led by Lukas Ligeti (the son of the noted composer), combines West African rhythms and electronic dance-floor effects. This seemingly fractured approach is united by the enchanting and energetic voice of its lead singer, Maï Lingani. The group plays the Hiro Ballroom this week.

Spoon, **"Transference"** (Merge, Jan. 19)—The Austin-based indie-rock stalwarts released a song called "Something to Look Forward To" all the way back in 2002. Now Britt Daniel and company kick off the new year with their latest collection, including the single "Written in Reverse."

The Magnetic Fields, **"Realism"** (Nonesuch, Jan. 26)—Stephin Merritt's main band's last album, "Distortion," lurched into noisy rock, Magnetic Fields-style, with lots of feedback; this record is folkier, though the lyrics are again concerned with the difficulties of love. The band will tour starting in February and stop at BAM just before Valentine's Day.

Charlotte Gainsbourg, **"IRM"** (Because, Jan. 26)—Gainsbourg, of course, is the daughter of Serge Gainsbourg and Jane Birkin, and she has forged a dual career as an actress and a singer. Here, she fashions a world of dissonant electronic folk with her producer, the jack-of-all-trades Beck.

Peter Gabriel, **"Scratch My Back"** (Virgin, Feb. 15)—Gabriel has been away from the pop-music scene for what seems like forever; he's been more concerned with world music and high-concept projects. His return, produced by the hard-rock veteran Bob Ezrin, finds him covering songs by stars both younger (Arcade Fire, Bon Iver) and older (Lou Reed, Neil Young).

Erykah Badu, **"New Amerykah, Part II: Return of the Ankh"** (Motown, Feb. 23)—Badu's 2008 album, "New Amerykah, Part One: 4th World War," was a politically charged neo-soul suite with cutting-edge production; this time, she's using mostly live musicians and focussing on the personal realm.

David Byrne and Fatboy Slim, **"Here Lies Love"** (Nonesuch, Feb. 23)—This collaboration is one of the most ambitious projects either artist has undertaken in years: a two-disk song cycle about Imelda Marcos, featuring guest spots from a crazy-quilt lineup that includes Santigold, Tori Amos, Sharon Jones, St. Vincent, Natalie Merchant, and Cyndi Lauper.

Ry Cooder/The Chieftains, **"San Patricio"** (Fantasy, March 9)—In 1846, a group of Irish-Americans deserted the United States Army to join the Mexican side in the Mexican-American War. That strange chapter of history is the subject of this collaboration; guests include Liam Neeson, Linda Ronstadt, and the ninety-year-old Mexican singer Chavela Vargas.

Drive-By Truckers, **"The Big To-Do"** (ATO, March 16)—The Truckers have undergone personnel changes and been accused of slipping slightly, but the band's leader and principal songwriter, Patterson Hood, says that this release offers a harder sound than anything since "Southern Rock Opera," from 2001. The group visits Webster Hall on April 1.

Joan Armatrading, **"This Charming Life"** (429 Records, March 30)—Armatrading enjoyed something of a resurgence with her somewhat traditional "Into the Blues," in 2007; this new album will be accompanied by an extensive European tour.

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late Heath Ledger, all in the same role, as a pony-tailed charmer in a white suit.—*Anthony Lane* (12/21 & 28/09) (In wide release.)

INVICTUS

Clint Eastwood's stirring tribute to Nelson Mandela's moral grandeur and practical wisdom carries a whiff of the official—but the importance of this sort of virtuous public spectacle is itself the subject of the movie. The drama concerns Mandela's embrace, in 1995—soon after his election as South Africa's first post-apartheid President—of the country's rugby team (generally loved by whites and hated by blacks) when the country hosted the sport's World Cup tournament. Morgan Freeman brings a sublime dignity and self-mastery to the role of Mandela. As Francois Pienaar, the team captain, to whom Mandela reaches out, Matt Damon lends good-humored smarts to the athlete's quiet rise to enlightenment. Eastwood's view of South Africa is sketchy but warmhearted and filled with fine-grained details. We mostly see Mandela at work, exerting power gracefully and compassionately, and there are no intimate revelations and no ambiguities or ironies. Rather, the movie takes its place in Eastwood's rigorous series of latter-day reflections on democratic values—here, the republic rests on the shoulders of a virtuous leader who understands the power of political symbolism and senses that a country unites not around its ideas but around its images. As such, it's also a defense of Eastwood's own popular artistry—and of the system that sustains it.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

IT'S COMPLICATED

Is Nancy Meyers ("Something's Gotta Give") the squarest person ever to make a movie? This new embarrassment helps make the case. Meryl Streep, reduced to giggling, fumbling, gossipy ordinariness for the first time in her career, is a wealthy divorcée with a bakery in Santa Monica and a big house in Malibu that, for some reason, isn't big enough. She wants to build an addition with a huge kitchen (even though half the movie takes place in her existing kitchen, which is large enough to yield endless meals and seat eight). She has an affair with the husband who left her ten years earlier, played by Alec Baldwin, who comes off as hyperaggressive, dull, wet, and fat. At the same time, Streep flirts with her architect, played all milquetoasty by Steve Martin. The characters are upper-middle-class people who act like TV's lower-middle-class people. There are many scenes devoted to the extraordinary news that sixty-year-olds actually do it. The dialogue is redundant, the direction coarse and obvious. John Krasinski, mugging creatively as Streep's prospective son-in-law, is the only one in the movie operating with professional skill.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

THE LOVELY BONES

In the movie, as in Alice Sebold's 2002 best-seller, Susie (Saoirse Ronan), a fourteen-year-old girl, narrates, from Heaven or wherever it is, her own murder in 1973 at the hands of a neighborhood creep (Stanley Tucci); then she observes her father (Mark Wahlberg), mother (Rachel Weisz), and sister (Rose McIver) as they miserably cope with her death. But, in Peter Jackson's adaptation, she is not merely present in their minds; she is there, prompting, warning, claiming a kiss from her handsome teen boyfriend. The book was brought off with considerable delicacy—it's really a detailed portrait of a suburban girl's life in the seventies. Literalized in the movie, the material is closer to a high-toned ghost story. Jackson intermingles family goings on with Susie's gossamer interventions, and some of the brushed-with-ether imagery comes close to the uncanny, but a lot of it is fussy-baroque, redundant, and undramatic. Jackson's Heaven has luscious hills and dales, gleaming lakes, and fields of waving grain. The picture has been fashioned as a holiday family entertainment about a grisly murder and grief, and it's more than a little sickening. Fran Walsh and Philippa Boyens worked with Jackson on the screenplay. With Michael Imperioli.—*D.D.* (12/14/09) (In wide release.)

MISSION TO MOSCOW

Joseph Davies, the American ambassador to the Soviet Union in the late nineteen-thirties, wrote the memoir on which this blatantly tendentious 1943 wartime docudrama (produced by Warner Bros., at the behest of F.D.R.) is based. Davies (who speaks for himself in a prologue) is portrayed by Walter Huston as a plainspoken lawyer who arrives in the U.S.S.R. as the President's unprejudiced fact finder and discovers that the Russians are just like us, that their government is not so different from ours, and that they are boundlessly enthusiastic for their new system—except for pro-Nazi saboteurs, working under Trotsky's orders, who confess to their crimes at already notorious show trials, which Davies declares legit. All that's missing from the director Michael Curtiz's simplistic and sentimental propaganda pageant (complete with caviar and Kazatsky) is speech bubbles and Ben-Day dots, but the story of Davies's increasingly frantic diplomatic exertions to forge a British and French alliance with the U.S.S.R. in the face of rising German threats builds to a searing real-time climax—Nazi Germany's then-unchallenged dominion over Europe. The whitewash of Soviet reality is thorough, and was doubtless important to the American war effort, but the cinematic unconscious links Stalin's political victims to his cultural ones (a corps de ballet performing "Swan Lake" at his sufferance) and pairs their confessions with a mass leap from airplanes by a show troupe of parachutists.—*R.B.* (BAM; Jan. 12.)

NINE

Given how hard it is to get movies off the ground, why are so many adapted from works that cry out *not* to be made into movies in the first place? Just as it was easy to see that a film of "The Road," shorn of Cormac McCarthy's prose, would—and could only—slow to a miserable plod, so Rob Marshall's new work was, from the start, bowed by the burden of its origins. It is adapted from a stage musical, which was in turn adapted from Fellini's "8½," which is all about a man who is unable to make a movie. For all the high-kicking oomph to which Marshall's film aspires, that sense of inertia lingers; we see it in Guido Contini (Daniel Day-Lewis), who doesn't even have a script on the eve of production. What he does have is the memory of women crowding in upon him, and each of them gets to say, or sing, her piece; the musical numbers are not embedded in the action but float alongside it as a form of fantastical commentary—again, hardly an incentive for dramatic pace. The singers are a distinguished company: Sophia Loren, Penélope Cruz, Nicole Kidman, Kate Hudson, Fergie, Judi Dench, and Marion Cotillard, with the laurels divided between the last two. But even Day-Lewis, for all his flair and cunning, cannot spice the proceedings with much joy, and we are left with a hymn to regret.—*A.L.* (12/21 & 28/09) (In wide release.)

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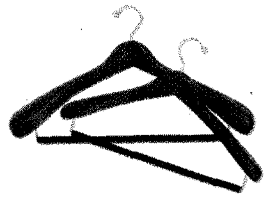

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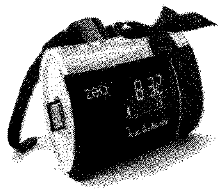

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POLICE, ADJECTIVE

Cristi (Dragos Bucur), a young plainclothes officer in the Romanian town of Vaslui, is assigned to follow a trio of teens, one of whom associates with a drug dealer. To Cristi's dismay, he is ordered to make a case against another kid in the group who is merely a user. The officer's struggle to resist his orders is the soul of this drama, directed by Corneliu Porumboiu, a quietly jolting dialectical and lexicographical masterwork. Porumboiu's images, all nouns and verbs, withhold inflection in order to highlight the moral weight of creating and interpreting information; his taut long takes maintain the tension of incisive scenes featuring debates about language. Cristi's wife, Anca (Irina Saulescu), is a literature teacher, and their dinnertime parsing of a pop song and of his grammar (with the dictates of the Romanian Academy cited as authority) sets the stage for the climactic showdown with his chief (Vlad Ivanov), which takes place over a dictionary. With a quietly scintillating depth, the movie ultimately reveals the odd title's chilling implications and casts over today's Romania dark shadows from its Soviet-dominated past. In Romanian.—*R.B.* (IFC Center.)

SHERLOCK HOLMES

Arthur Conan Doyle's material has been grabbed by its velvet collar and kicked into twenty-first-century media culture. Such a turn was inevitable. The subdued charm of Doyle's hansom cabs, enveloping fogs, and courteous manners—the façade of gentility broken up so delightfully by devilish conspiracies—is not of our age. In Guy Ritchie's version, London in the eighteen-nineties is rubbled and mucky, with beggars underfoot, a city fouled by half-finished industrial monstrosities. The director's visual style is graphic-novel Victoriana, with steampunk interiors—ironworks and infernal machines with a retro-future look—and also dim laboratories in which everything looks rank. The movie is grimly overproduced and exhausting, an irritating, preposterous, but fitfully enjoyable work, in which every element has been inflated. As Holmes, Robert Downey, Jr., engages, barechested, in Victorian extreme fighting before a howling arena of Englishmen with bad teeth. Dr. Watson (Jude Law) is a fighter, too, wielding cane and sabre, palm and foot. The two men flirt with each other outrageously but chastely—it's the most amusing thing in the movie. With Rachel McAdams as Holmes's long-lost inamorata, Irene Adler, who turns up as a criminal.—*D.D.* (1/4/10) (In wide release.)

A SINGLE MAN

Tom Ford's début feature is adapted from the novel of the same name by Christopher Isherwood. Colin Firth plays George, who teaches literature at a college in Los Angeles in 1962; we find him bereaved after the death of his lover, Jim (Matthew Goode), although the action skips back in time, to show us the languor of the life they shared. There is barely enough here to sustain a plot, and much of the movie passes in a gleaming, immaculate haze; in keeping with the director's other career, as a fashion designer, no chance is missed to deck the characters in the neat, crisp outfits of the period, or to bathe them in the flattering rose light of the city. (Does Jim make his first appearance in George's life wearing white naval ducks? Of course he does.) Yet the film is pulled from its dreaminess by two performances: first, that of Firth, who shows how a heart can be both tightened and undone by grief (especially a grief that needs to be kept secret), and, second, that of Julianne Moore, who plays his drunken friend. The long evening they spend together, dicing with love and the knowledge of wasted years, is a scene not to be forgotten, or denied. With Nicholas Hoult as a precocious flirt.—*A.L.* (12/21 & 28/09) (In wide release.)

UP IN THE AIR

At long last, George Clooney meets his match. There have been previous attempts to pair him in romantic comedies, such as "Intolerable Cruelty," but, from the moment when, playing a business traveller named Ryan Bingham, he picks up Alex Goran (Vera Farmiga) in a bar, we realize that a battle of equals has commenced. Bingham fires people for a living (the director, Jason Reitman, could not have timed his movie better), while most of his own living is done on planes and in hotel rooms; he is a rootless soul who mistakes his emptiness for freedom, and it takes the efforts of Alex, his occasional lover, and of Natalie (Anna Kendrick), his perky new colleague, to school him in the error of his ways. Reitman's film both satisfies and dismays; the one-liners fly back and forth, but, if you happen to look down, there are oceans of hopelessness below. With Jason Bateman as Bingham's cynical boss.—*A.L.* (12/7/09) (In wide release.)

THE WHITE RIBBON

Even those who have resisted—or, indeed, recoiled from—the work of Michael Haneke may find themselves drawn into the calm and complicated tale that he tells in his latest film. We find ourselves in a village in northern, Protestant Germany, a year before the outbreak of the First World War, and there, with only the briefest of excursions to the world beyond, we stay. We also come to know, or think we know, the home lives of its leading citizens, including the local baron (Ulrich Tukur), the pastor (Burghart Klaussner), the doctor (Rainer Bock), and his frightened housekeeper (Susanne Lothar). More baffling are the lives of their various children, who are the victims of, and, we increasingly suspect, the possible culprits in, a series of mysterious crimes. This being a Haneke project, no case is thoroughly solved, and the air of threat that looms over the population is never dispelled; we can readily imagine, in fact, that its malignity might endure for years to come—perhaps to the verge of another war. The film, however, should not be read as a plain parable of incipient Nazism; the warning that it issues, about the fallout of social repression, is a universal one, and the manner of its delivery is disarmingly graceful. The monochrome imagery is not just jewel-sharp but, unusually for Haneke, touched with moments of loveliness and hints of peace, as in the subplot of a schoolteacher (Christian Friedel) and his beloved (Leonie Benesch). You expect harm to befall them, like a plague, but, for once, it stays its hand. In German.—*A.L.* (In limited release.)

Also Playing

A CHRISTMAS CAROL: In wide release. **DID YOU HEAR ABOUT THE MORGANS?:** In wide release. **SITA SINGS THE BLUES:** IFC Center.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—Special screenings. Jan. 7 at 7:30: "Cycling the Frame" (1988, Cynthia Beatt) and "The Invisible Frame" (2009, Beatt). ♦ Jan. 10 at 7:30: Paul Sharits program, including "Shutter Interface" (1975). ♦ "Essential Cinema." Jan. 8 at 7:30 and 9:30: Maya Deren program, including "Meshes of the Afternoon" (1943). ♦ Jan. 9 at 6: "Zvenigora" (1928, Alexandr Dovzhenko; silent, with Russian intertitles). ♦ Jan. 9 at 8: "Arsenal" (1929, Dovzhenko; silent, with Russian intertitles). ♦ Jan. 10 at 5: "Earth" (1930, Dovzhenko; silent, with Russian intertitles).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—In première. Jan. 7 at 7: "Fish Tank" (2009, Andrea Arnold), followed by a Q. & A. with the director. ♦ Special screening. Jan. 12 at 7: "Mission to Moscow" (†), followed by a panel discussion with the writers Lou Lumenick, Farran Smith Nehme, Glenn Kenny, and Ed Hulse.

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—Through Feb. 4: "Akira Kurosawa Centennial." Jan. 6-14 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Stray Dog" (1949).

FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (212-875-5610)—The films of Louis Malle. Jan. 6 at 2: "The Fire Within" (1963; in French). ♦ Jan. 6 at 4:15: "The Lovers" (1958; in French). ♦ Jan. 6 at 6:15 and Jan. 7 at 1: "My Dinner with Andre" (1981). The Jan. 6 screening will be followed by a discussion with Wallace Shawn. ♦ Jan. 6 at 8:45: "Murmur of the Heart" (1971; in French). ♦ Jan. 7 at 3:15: "Vanya on 42nd Street" (1994). ♦ Special Event. Jan. 9 at 6:30: An evening with Jeff Bridges. ♦ "Chopin on Film." Jan. 8 at 2 and 6:30 and Jan. 10 at 3:

"Young Chopin" (1952, Aleksander Ford; in Polish). ♦ Jan. 8 at 4:30, Jan. 10 at 3, and Jan. 12 at 3:15: Film from the International Chopin Piano Competition. ♦ Jan. 8 at 9 and Jan. 12 at 1: "Impromptu" (1991, James Lapine).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Through Feb. 23: The films of Charlotte Gainsbourg. Jan. 12 at 12:30, 4, and 7:30: "The Science of Sleep" (2006, Michel Gondry).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—Through April 4: ""La Crème du Crime." Jan. 8-10 at 11 A.M.: "Elevator to the Gallows" (1958, Louis Malle; in French). ♦ "Stranger Than Fiction," a documentary series. Jan. 11 at 8: "Valentino: The Last Emperor" (2009, Matt Tyrnauer).

MAYSLES CINEMA
343 Lenox Ave., between 127th and 128th Sts. (212-582-6050)—Special screening. Jan. 7 at 7:30: "The Cry of Jazz" (†), followed by a discussion with the film critic Armond White.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"An Auteurist History of Film." Jan. 6-8 at 1:30: "Broken Blossoms" (1919, D. W. Griffith) and "True Heart Susie" (1919, Griffith). ♦ "MOMA Presents." Jan. 6 and Jan. 8 at 7, Jan. 7 and Jan. 11 at 4, Jan. 9 at 1:30, and Jan. 10 at 5: "A Year Ago in Winter" (2008, Caroline Link). ♦ "The Contenders." Jan. 6-7 at 8: "My Neighbor, My Killer" (2009, Anne Aghion). The director will introduce both screenings. ♦ Jan. 8 at 8 and Jan. 9 at 5: "In the Loop" (2009, Armando Iannucci). ♦ "Tim Burton." Jan. 11 at 4:30: "Pee-wee's Big Adventure" (1985).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000, ext. 344)—"Cabaret Cinema." Jan. 8 at 9:30: "The Eclipse" (†).

SUNSHINE CINEMA
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—"Sunshine@ Midnight." Jan. 8-9: "The Thing" (1982, John Carpenter).

READINGS AND TALKS

"FREERANGE NONFICTION"
This monthly reading series presents Ben Yagoda, who will offer selections from his new book, "Memoir: A History." (Cornelia Street Café, 29 Cornelia St. For more information, call 212-989-9319 or visit www.freerangenonfiction.com. Jan. 6 at 6.)

"HAPPY ENDING MUSIC AND READING SERIES @ JOE'S PUB"
The downtown series continues, with an evening of stories about America. Colum McCann, Jonathan Dee, and Rich Benjamin are the readers, and Jim White is the musical guest. (425 Lafayette St. 212-539-8777. Jan. 6 at 7.)

HOUSING WORKS BOOKSTORE CAFÉ
Julie Powell, Amanda Hesser, Merrill Stubbs, Ed Levine, Cathy Erway, and Lynn Andriani discuss writing about food for the Web. (126 Crosby St. 212-334-3324. Jan. 7 at 7.)

BOWERY POETRY CLUB
Ain Gordon, Bob Holman, David Cale, Carmelita Tropicana, and Josh Lefkowitz read from the works of Spalding Gray, the actor and writer who went missing in January of 2004 and whose body was discovered in the East River two months later. (308 Bowery, at Bleecker St. 212-614-0505. Jan. 10 at 8.)

BARNES & NOBLE
Philip Gourevitch, the editor of *The Paris Review,* interviews the novelist Richard Price. (150 E. 86th St. No tickets necessary. Jan. 11 at 7.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"MUSICAL SUPPERS"
In "A Moveable Feast," Hemingway remarked upon the optimal condition for visiting the Luxembourg Museum. "All the paintings were heightened and clearer and more beautiful if you were belly-empty, hollow hungry," he wrote. The New York Philharmonic presents a high-style opportunity to discover whether the same holds true for music: it's putting on a series of post-concert dinners featuring such chefs as Jean-Georges Vongerichten, Lidia Bastianich, and Daniel Boulud. The food writer Mimi Sheraton is the host, and the musical director, Alan Gilbert, the Philharmonic president and executive director, Zarin Mehta, and musicians from the orchestra will be present. The series starts on Jan. 8. The Philharmonic will be playing a Russian program that evening, but the chef will be French—Alain Ducasse opens the series. (Arpeggio Food and Wine, Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656.)

"THE TOUGHEST SPORT ON EARTH"
The top forty professional bull riders in the world compete in an invitational tournament at Madison Square Garden. The 2009 World Champion, Kody Lostroh, from Colorado, will be on hand. He'll have to face down North Carolina's J. B. Mauney, who has won two out of his three appearances at the Garden. (800-745-3000. Jan. 8-10.)

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ON THE HORIZON

THE THEATRE
LOVE HURTS
Jan. 13

"Venus in Fur" is something of a departure for David Ives, who was most recently represented on Broadway with "Irving Berlin's White Christmas." Classic Stage Company presents the drama, which is based on the erotic novel by the Austrian author Leopold von Sacher-Masoch (whose name is the derivation of the word "masochism") and takes place in an audition for a play. Walter Bobbie directs. (212-352-3101.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
RETURN OF THE KING
Jan. 18-Feb. 6

The long and illustrious career of the tenor Plácido Domingo will take another twist at the Metropolitan Opera, where, for the first time, he will appear as a baritone—singing the title role, the Doge of Genoa, in Verdi's "Simon Boccanegra." (212-362-6000.)

MOVIES
RED SHIFT
Jan. 21-28

Rob Nilsson's "Northern Lights," a prize-winner at the 1979 Cannes festival, was produced by Cine Manifest, a San Francisco-based Marxist film collective. It's included in a retrospective of the group's works at Anthology Film Archives, as is Judy Irola's 2006 documentary, about its members' reunion. (212-505-5181.)

ART
WHEN IN ROME
Jan. 22-May 9

Among the sixteenth-century works on paper in "Rome After Raphael," at the Morgan Library and Museum, are four sketches of David slaying Goliath by Michelangelo, a pen-and-ink Pietá by Parmigianino, and a drawing of a flying putto by Annibale Carracci. (212-685-0008.)

NIGHT LIFE
HOT CLUB DATES
Feb. 1-3

A week after the hundredth anniversary of Django Reinhardt's birth (Jan. 23), the French Gypsy-guitar master Dorado Schmitt pays tribute to him at the Iridium club. He'll be joined by his son, Samson, on guitar, Marcel Loeffler, on accordion, and Pierre Blanchard, on violin. (212-582-2121.)

Classic Stage Company presents David Ives's "Venus in Fur."

JOSH COCHRAN

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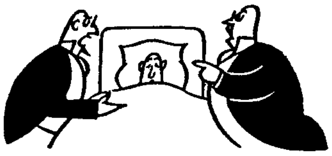
THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
UM, PATHETIC



"All violent feelings have the same effect," John Ruskin wrote, in one of his most famous essays. "They produce in us a falseness in all our impressions of external things, which I would generally characterize as the 'Pathetic Fallacy.'" Ruskin published "Of the Pathetic Fallacy" in 1856, as a chapter of "Modern Painters." His subject, in this chapter, was poetry, not painting, and it was certainly not politics. But his insight may help explain the American political atmosphere at the beginning of the year 2010, especially the subdued, sometimes even angry, mood among many of President Obama's wavering, if not quite erstwhile, supporters.

When Congress reconvenes a few days from now, it will be on the cusp of enacting a sweeping reform of American health insurance and health care that could be, as the President put it on Christmas Eve, just after the Senate passed its version of the bill, "the most important piece of social legislation since the Social Security Act passed in the nineteen-thirties and the most important reform of our health-care system since Medicare passed in the nineteen-sixties." Perhaps he was exaggerating, but not by much. Jonathan Cohn, the *New Republic's* health-care correspondent, calls the bill "the most ambitious piece of domestic legislation in a generation—a bill that will extend insurance coverage to tens of millions of Americans, strengthen insurance for many more, and start refashioning American medicine so that it is more efficient." Paul Krugman, the *Times*' resident Nobel laureate (and a frequent Obama critic), calls the bill "a great achievement" that "establishes the principle—even if it falls somewhat short in practice—that all Americans are entitled to essential health care." Princeton's Paul Starr, the author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning history "The Social Transformation of American Medicine," calls it "the single biggest measure on behalf of low-income Americans in more than forty years." How big? The University of Chicago's Harold Pollack has done the sums. By the time the reforms are fully implemented, "the Senate bill would provide about $196 billion per year down the income scale in subsidies to low-income and working Americans." That's more, Pollack notes, than the federal government spends on the earned-income tax credit, Head Start, assistance to single mothers and their children, nutrition programs like food stamps, and the National Institutes of Health combined.

None of these people, from Obama on down the wonk scale, deceive themselves that the Senate bill, which now must be merged with its (marginally stronger) House equivalent, comes within hailing distance of perfection. All of them recognize that the final bill, in the now overwhelmingly likely event that it surmounts the remaining hurdles, will be flawed and messy. All of them also understand that, compared with the status quo—and the status quo, not perfection or anything like it, is the alternative—it will constitute a moral and material advance of historic proportions.

Nevertheless, a nontrivial portion (though far from a majority) of the Democratic left, particularly its Internet cohort, feels alienated and disappointed, with the bill and with the President. As the Senate vote neared, Markos Moulitsas, the chief of Daily Kos, sent his followers a tweet: "Insurance companies

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

win. Time to kill this monstrosity coming out of the Senate." MoveOn.org called on "progressives" to "block this bill." Arianna Huffington dismissed it as "reform in name only." Keith Olbermann, MSNBC's Savonarola, lectured the President that he was about to consign his countrymen to a "Chicago stockyards of insurance" that would be "immoral and a betrayal of the people who elected you." Even Dr. Dean himself—Howard Dean, the former Vermont governor, Presidential candidate, and Democratic Party chairman—wrote that the Senate should defeat the bill, claiming that it "would do more harm than good to the future of America." And in the nether reaches of the left blogosphere the epithets flew. Obama is a "sellout." He's a "liar." He's a "Judas," a "fraud," a "corrupt fool." He's a "Liebermanite." (Ouch!) He's "an Uncle Tom groveling before the demands of the corporations that are running our country." (This last not from some anonymous blog commenter but from Ralph Nader, without whose efforts Joe Lieberman would be just another former Vice-President.)

The pathetic fallacy is a category mistake. It's the false attribution of human feelings, thoughts, or intentions to inanimate objects, or to living entities that cannot possibly have such feelings, thoughts, or intentions—cruel seas, dancing leaves, hot air that "wants" to rise. The American government has its human aspects—it is staffed by human beings, mostly—but its atomized, at-odds-with-itself legislative structure (House and Senate, each with its arcane rules, its semi-feudal committee chairs, and its independently elected members, none of whom are accountable or fully responsible for outcomes) makes it more like an inanimate object. In our sclerotic lawmaking process, it is not enough that the President, a majority of both Houses of Congress, and a majority of the voters at the last election favor extending health care to all citizens.

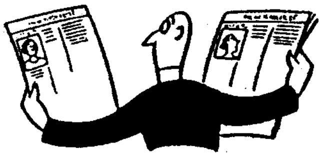
The left-wing critics are right about the conspicuous flaws of the pending health-care reform—its lack of even a weak "public option," its too meagre subsidies, its windfalls for Big Pharma, its capitulation on abortion coverage, its reliance on private insurance. And there are surely senators and representatives whose motives are base or, broadly speaking, corrupt. But it is nonsense to attribute the less than fully satisfactory result to the alleged perfidy of the President or "the Democrats." The critics' indignation would be better directed at what an earlier generation of malcontents called "the system"—starting, perhaps, with the Senate's filibuster rule, an inanimate object if there ever was one.

On May 20, 1962, at Madison Square Garden, John F. Kennedy spoke to some twenty thousand people at a rally in support of a bill to provide hospital care for the aged, one of forty-five such rallies around the country. In his speech, President Kennedy acknowledged that his bill would fall short of meeting every need. "We've got great unfinished business in this country," he said, "and while this bill does not solve our problems in this area, I do not believe it is a valid argument to say, 'This bill isn't going to do the job.' It will not, but it will do part of it."

Two months later, Kennedy's bill was defeated in the Senate. It took his assassination, a huge Democratic victory in 1964, and the legislative talents of President Lyndon Johnson to get Medicare enacted. The health-care bill now being kicked and prodded and bribed toward passage will not "do the job," either—only part of it. Are Barack Obama and the Democrats in Congress doing enough? No. But they are doing what's possible. That may be pathetic, but it's no fallacy.

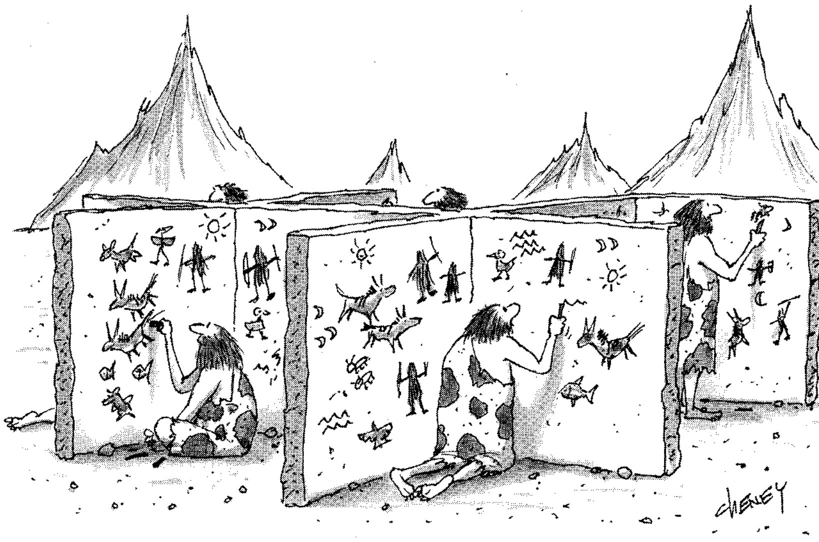
—*Hendrik Hertzberg*

HELL, NO DEPT.
KING KONG VS. GODZILLA



New Yorkers returning to the city and its tabloids last week were greeted by a pair of reassuringly belligerent ads. Readers of Monday's *Post* encountered first a notice from the Fox Broadcasting Company. "ATTENTION! STARTING JANUARY 1ST, TIME WARNER CABLE MAY STOP CARRYING FOX 5," it declared, in white and liquigel-blue letters, proceeding to other incitements ("NO FOX? NO WAY!") and a series of screen shots of Fox 5 stars presumably worth fighting for—Ernie Anastos and Bart Simpson. Several pages later, readers encountered a huge paste-up-style ransom note: "PAY OUR PRICE OR YOU'LL NEVER SEE FOX AGAIN." Placed by Time Warner Cable, the ad went on to say, "We're standing up to Fox. Don't let Fox hold your TV hostage."

Here was the dispute: The contract that entitled Time Warner Cable to carry Fox's programming would expire December 31st. Fox wanted more money. Time Warner Cable did not want to pay. If the standoff was not resolved before the contract deadline, viewers would face Sunday afternoons without the Giants and weeknights without "American Idol." To monitor public opinion, and to sway it, Time Warner had, in November, launched a campaign called "Roll Over or Get



Tough," which asked customers to visit a Web site of the same name and vote on whether Time Warner should "give in to their demand for massive price increases" or keep "holding the line." Eight hundred thousand people had done so. (Ninety-five per cent of them thought that Time Warner should "Get Tough.") Fox, late, for once, to the rabble-rousing, set up a nearly identical Web site of its own, KeepFoxOn.com. This was not David vs. Goliath, or even MySpace vs. Facebook, but the duelling ads were snappier than the usual corporate full-pagers—pious notes from Mobil and bar graphs showing the G.D.P. of Kazakhstan. A call to Time Warner revealed that the company had hired Purple Strategies, a Washington, D.C., public-affairs firm, to create the campaign. Bruce Haynes, the partner in charge of the ads, said, "When Fox comes and says, 'Look, you're gonna pay up, up to three hundred per cent more, or we'll take away these shows from customers,' it's an outrageous demand. It kind of reminds you of Dr. Evil. Where's the guy with the pinkie on his lip saying, 'We want one billion dollars'?" (Never mind that Dr. Evil was asking for only one million.)

For "Roll Over or Get Tough," Haynes—a consultant to the Republican National Committee in 2008—imported some political tactics. "Most successful marketing campaigns now allow people to be a part of them," Haynes said. "With the Obama campaign, *you* were the change that was necessary—it wasn't just him." The campaign also had Palinesque undertones, separating the world into two categories—wimps and warriors—without explaining exactly why it matters if your cable company can kick ass.

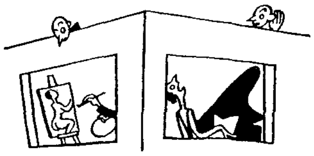
"Roll Over or Get Tough" is a false dichotomy: instead of either passing Fox's rate hikes on to the customer or depriving him of "24," Time Warner Cable could absorb the increased cost of programming itself. In logic, a choice between two unpleasant options is called a Morton's Fork (also known as "between a rock and a hard place"), after John Morton, a Lord Chancellor under Henry VII, who asserted that those who lived well were rich, and could therefore pay high taxes, while those who lived modestly had savings, and could also pay high taxes. Mark Turner, a professor of cognitive science at Case Western Reserve, explained that Time Warner's use of the forced-choice device was wise from the standpoint of behavioral economics. In order to make choices, people need their options narrowed in advance. Turner said, " 'By land or by sea'—that actually means 'by any means whatsoever,' but, even when you have a continuum, you can represent it by a pole, and that really catches people's attention." This principle was not lost on the producers of the horror movie "Zombieland," whose posters, this summer, featured the tagline "Nut Up or Shut Up."

Turner saw other cognitive precepts at work in the "Roll Over" campaign. He explained, "The purpose of the ad is to try to get you off your duff and realize, 'Hey, the situation around me is changing, and I better take action.' " And the campaign's militaristic echoes—"You're either with us or against us"—incorporated, Turner said, a technique called "blending," in which a rhetorician exploits what is already in people's minds. "Everybody's got terrorism on the brain, so if you can have a little hint of that issue in your advertising about cable service—great!" he said.

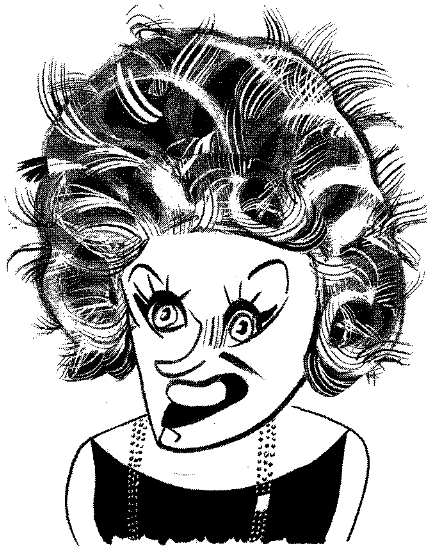
As the deadline for negotiations approached, Purple Strategies was working out of what Haynes called a "virtual war room," mocking up responses to every possible outcome. "For instance, if Fox decides to dig in its heels and says Time Warner's customer base be damned, it could take its shows off the air, which would require Time Warner Cable to communicate with its customer in a certain way—'You told us to get tough, and we did.' " The strategy in a nutshell: couch potatoes as human shields.

—Lauren Collins

LEGENDS
DILLER AT NINETY-TWO



When a visitor was shown into Phyllis Diller's mansion, in Brentwood, the other evening, Diller rose carefully from a settee. "Have a Martini," she said. "You have to look at the art, and it helps." She was wearing one of her trademark yellow fright wigs, and her right hand sported a large yellow ring that somewhat resembled a snail. "Do you like my ring? I call it 'the golden turd.' " Her laugh is a raucous *Ha!*, as if an "H" and an "A" had collided in midair.



Phyllis Diller

Diller moved into her house, a ten-thousand-square-foot stucco affair, in 1965, after leaving the first of two unhappy marriages. She was America's most famous female comedian, a fixture in Bob Hope movies and on television specials, where she often played a kooky, gaudily costumed housewife. In those days, Judy Garland lived just up the street. Then came the "Gong Show" years, and, as Diller's bookings dried up, she began to paint. Late at night, she'd throw on a pink smock, put some Gershwin on the stereo, and work up an ink or acrylic sketch of a castle, a few daisies, or Alex Trebek. In 2003, when she was eighty-six, she began holding "art parties," several times a year, to sell the work, along with her outfits and her costume jewelry. She explained, "I'm only leaving here toes up—I'm not going to any home for little old ladies—and I'm not taking anything with me! Word gets out, and people get on the list to come. I don't know them from Adam, but I seem to be the queen of the gay people. I'm witty, I'm bright, I'm loose, and I wear feathers."

One of Diller's assistants, Karla, conducted a tour, beginning with a few dozen of Diller's canvases outside the Bob Hope Salon. After a detour to the guest bathroom, the Edith Head, the tour proceeded to the Gallery, a hallway lined with Diller originals, including a portrait of Meg Ryan ($400). The Boutique showcased Diller's Bo Derek wig, seen on "The Hollywood Squares" ($500), along with a brocaded red velvet cape she wore on "The Love Boat" ($1,000) and a Plant Costume heavy with plastic ivy ($2,000). Downstairs, in the entrance hall, was Diller's chef d'œuvre, "And Now . . . ," a joyful painting of a spotlight on a curtain. "That's two hundred thousand," Diller said, looking up from her Martini. "It's an oil and it took longer."

Diller led the way to dinner, humming "Plaisir d'Amour." She passed through the Scarlet Scullery and into the Antoine Dining Room, settled into her chair, and rang a silver bell. Another assistant, named Shelley, appeared, to serve the meal that Diller had prepared.

"Yes, Madam?"

"The shrimp," Diller said. Shelley returned with plates containing three roasted shrimp each. "Usually, I see only rich older women who like me to amuse them," Diller observed. "Last night, it was this woman who's petite, a philanthropist, depressed—I don't know *what* happened to her husband, she may have done him in herself—and looking for excitement. She took me to the Peninsula Hotel to hear Tony, the pianist, and we saw this hooker! She had long black hair all down her back, and this great, phony white fur coat that I wanted to rip off her body. She'd clearly missed her connection, because she kept running around, in her high heels, like a decapitated fowl. She must charge three thousand dollars a night. In my mind I could just see the guy she was supposed to meet, an old C.E.O., bald, married to a woman who's at home reading the Bible, not even embracing evolution. Whereas I embrace the fact that I come from a worm." She drank her Martini and shook the bell: "The salad."

"Yes, Madam."

"If only women could understand that men—they're here to screw, their minds never leave screwing. Men have to do it with hookers because their wives wear curlers and won't tickle them with a turkey feather." After a moment, she added, "There's a joke I consider current: The best contraception for old people"—she held her visitor's eyes—"is nudity! *Ha!*" She rang the bell. "The truth, the blessed truth!"

"Yes, Madam?"

"The ice cream."

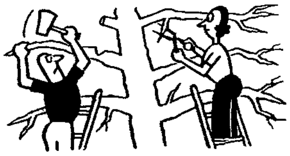
"Don't think small!" Diller declared suddenly. "Onward and upward, that's why we're here. Did you see my grand pianos?" Her house has two, along with a harpsichord. "Liberace told me to use the piano in my act, and I ended up playing with a hundred symphony orchestras. Nowadays, I could break my arm just brushing my teeth. *Ha!*"

After dinner, she took her visitor's elbow. "Did you see my wardrobe? Oh, good. I invented the see-through hatbox, you know." Her smile was bright. "Happiness keeps you from dying from a lot of terrible things. Ain't I a happy broad?"

—*Tad Friend*

START YOUR ENGINES

TIMBER!



Some years ago, after a holiday party, an amateur arborist spied a linden-tree branch extending vulnerably out over East Third Street. Somewhat in his cups, and fearing that a passerby might tug on the branch and end up stripping the tree of bark, the arborist made an executive decision to perform an amputation on the spot, twisting the branch over and over until it snapped, while leaving the bark on the trunk intact. To the owner of a nearby restaurant, the emergency procedure looked suspiciously like vandalism. Threats were made to call the police. The arborist remained calm. "It's O.K.," he said, and reached for his wallet to produce a laminated badge. "I'm a citizen pruner." Impressed, the restaurateur invited him in for a drink.

Citizen pruners, a few thousand Samaritans trained in the art of botanical stewardship by the nonprofit organization Trees New York, are licensed to perform surgery on the city's street trees, as their judgment demands. "You can use a pole saw, you can use a handsaw, you can use two-handed loppers," the holiday arborist said the other day. "You can do a lot of good with a pocketknife."

But let's say you really wanted to fell a whole tree (preferably an unhealthy one). Well, then, your best bet would have been to show up at an open lot on Randall's Island, where, on a recent cold and windy morning, a group of lumberjacks were conducting a lesson in proper chain-saw technique.

"Chaps, that's the first thing," one instructor said, holding up a pair of bright-orange coveralls to be fastened around the waist, and beginning an hour-long preamble on the various ways in which an underdressed woodcutter can wind up looking like a victim of the horror-movie villain Leatherface.

"Let me make a point about safety glasses," another added. "You need to have on a pair of Z87s. You know what that rating means? It means I can take a hammer and smash that glass as hard as I can and it will not break." The students, about thirty underprivileged young people enrolled in the MillionTreesNYC training program, began examining their goggles. "Standard glasses aren't like that," the instructor went on. "Even though your doctor may tell you, 'It's shatterproof. They're safe.' Yeah? That lens goes back to the eyeball—it'll cut your eye out of your skull."

Boots: check. Earplugs ("Use a chain saw long enough without ear protection, and I guarantee you'll be deaf"): check. Cell phone set to vibrate ("so it doesn't ring and startle somebody"): check. On to fuelling. A third instructor produced a bottle of Stihl BioPlus lubricant. "If you add fuel on turf, it's going to kill the turf," he said, unscrewing the cap and preparing to pour. "If you do it on those blacktop driveways, it's going to dissolve the driveway."

"Best thing is the tailgate of your pickup truck," another suggested.

Finally, it was time to start the engines. "Look how sharp that saw is," the lead instructor said, after slicing through a log to produce a wood "cookie." "You imagine that's your arm, or your face?" One rule of thumb has it that a hundred and fifty stitches are required for every second of contact between a chain blade and human skin.

A dozen white poplars, stripped of their branches to resemble telephone poles, had been propped up across the lot, for practice mutilation. The class broke into groups and began cutting forty-five-degree notches into the dummy trees, which began to look like drunken totem poles. Next came the back cuts, and a lecture on the importance of leaving a hinge, for directional felling control. "Here's what people do: they cut it and they go like this," the goggles expert said, bending his head back and looking up. "They go, 'Oooh.' They watch their work. And that tree hits the ground and the thing bounces back and it smashes them in the chest and it kills them." He began jogging away from the base of the pole. "At ten feet, go ahead and take a peek back," he said. "You're going to want to watch it. But keep going, man. Don't stick around. You'll die."

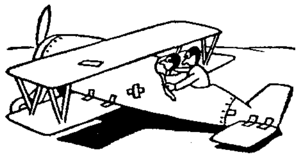
After a few hours on the saw, in the cold, the novices had begun to be numbed by hunger to the threat of death. A thick-bearded instructor named Al Krivickas bent over a log that lay on the ground and sawed through it until he struck a rock beneath, sending up a series of sparks.

"Damn!" one of the students gasped.

"Now it's lunchtime," Krivickas said, with a grin, holding up the dented chain. "That's usually how lunch comes about. That's why it's crazy they sell those things at Home Depot."

—*Ben McGrath*

ACROSS THE RIVER
FLIGHT TIME



All the commotion over at Teterboro Airport in the past year—two plane crashes in a month, and, after one, the F.A.A.'s censuring an air-traffic controller for making dead-cat jokes—has obscured the fact that Teterboro, aside from being the oldest operating airport in the New York area, is home to America's first state aviation hall of fame. The other day, Shea Oakley, the hall's executive director, was wrapping up the annual Teterboro air expo. As usual, the show, owing to its proximity to Newark Airport, was primarily on the ground. "Our air show is mostly a static air show," Oakley said. One notable plane that did not fly was the B-25, a Second World War bomber (like the one that hit the Empire State Building, in 1945) with Wright R-2600 engines, likely built in New Jersey. "It's a sound that makes an aviation enthusiast weak in the knees," Oakley said.

A few days before the expo, Suzanne Haller, Oakley's assistant and the other member of the staff of the Aviation Hall of Fame and Museum of New Jersey, answered a question from a young boy ("Is the giant airplane open?") and then played the museum's video, a Jersey-centered version of aviation history. In this telling, the 1793 Deptford, New Jersey, landing of a hot-air balloon is given primacy over the Philadelphia launch of the same balloon; the 1909 fixed-wing flight by the Boland Brothers, of Rahway, gets good screen time, the 1903 Wright Brothers flight does not. Other flying Jerseyites mentioned include the Hackensack native Walter Schirra, the only astronaut to fly in the Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo programs; and the Montclair-born Buzz Aldrin, the first New Jersey native to walk on the moon. "New Jersey's over two-hundred-year history of aviation is unsurpassed by any state," a voice-over declared. Afterward, Oakley said, "The first identical twins in space, Scott and Mark Kelly, are from New Jersey."

Oakley, who is forty-one, directs questions regarding the history of the museum itself to H. V. Pat Reilly, its founder. Reilly, reached by phone at home in Oradell, traced the museum's origin to a dinner in 1970, when, while doing P.R. for the airport, he met Clarence Chamberlin, the second person to cross the Atlantic to mainland Europe, two weeks after Charles Lindbergh, in a plane built in Paterson.

"Chamberlin flew farther than Lindbergh and he flew longer, but nobody remembered him, because people don't remember people who come in second," Reilly said. Two years later, Reilly opened a Teterboro-specific museum. Then he began accepting exhibits from around New Jersey, such as the Gloria, a rocket-mail plane said to be the first one fired between states (across Greenwood Lake, on the New York–New Jersey border, in an attempt to speed up interstate mail).

The Gloria was acquired serendipitously, like much of the collection. "A guy that was up at Greenwood Lake, he came down and said, 'I've got this thing if you want it,'" Reilly recalled. It hangs in the museum's Great Room, near two chunks of the Hindenburg, which burned in Lakehurst, New Jersey, and a B-52 ejection seat, on loan from the Belleville-based ejection-seat collection of Vincent Menza. Around the corner is the Hall of Fame, a room lined with bronzed plaques honoring people who flew in, over, or near New Jersey. "If they are alive and they are willing, they are inducted," Oakley said, at the museum.

Oakley gave a quick tour, showing off the world's first electronic flight simulator (Carlstadt) and an early hovercraft (Sussex). Upstairs, you could hear the real Teterboro flight tower broadcasting live. Outside, as several airplanes landed, Oakley showed off a "M*A*S*H" exhibit of trucks and helicopters. "Our feeling is that we need to be more Jersey-related, so 'M*A*S*H' will stay, but in a reduced form," he said.

In his office, Oakley spoke of having been a flight enthusiast since childhood. "I cannot remember a time before my interest," he once told the museum's newsletter, *Propwash*. He doesn't have a pilot's license, but he has kept a personal flight log since his first time in the air, as an infant, when his father gave him a Junior Jet Club logbook for a flight to Bermuda and had the captain date and sign it. "I've logged virtually every flight since 1968," he said. A while ago, he was checking his logs and noticed that a plane he had once flown in had subsequently crashed near New Orleans. Another was a United Airlines plane, N612UA, which, he suddenly realized, crashed into the World Trade Center, on September 11th. "I was cross-checking," he said, "and I noticed this."

—*Robert Sullivan*

LETTER FROM CHICAGO

AFTER THE BLOWUP

Laissez-faire economists do some soul-searching—and finger-pointing.

BY JOHN CASSIDY

Some visitors to the Everett M. Dirksen United States Courthouse, in downtown Chicago, come in search of justice, others leniency. I went looking for apostasy. After passing security and riding the elevator to the twenty-seventh floor, I was shown into the chambers of Judge Richard A. Posner, the famously prolific jurist, law professor, author, and, lately, blogger, who for decades has been a leading figure in the conservative Chicago School of economics. Arranging his thin frame on a leather sofa that afforded him a gull's-eye view of Lake Michigan, Posner held forth on the global economic slump that began in 2007, and the failure of many economists to foresee it. In a soft voice, he said, "I think the challenge is to the economics profession as a whole, but to Chicago most of all."

A lawyer by training, Posner is also one of the country's most influential economics writers. In his 1973 treatise "Economic Analysis of Law," he applied the maxims of free-market economics to the courtroom, arguing that enforcing economic efficiency ought to be a primary goal of judges. Posner, who was then a young professor at the University of Chicago Law School, helped create the law-and-economics movement, which has populated many of America's courts with judges of similar mind. In 1981, Ronald Reagan nominated him to the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals, and since then he has written more than two dozen books, including one defending the 2000 Supreme Court decision that gave George W. Bush the Presidency.

Earlier this year, Posner published "A Failure of Capitalism," in which he argues that lax monetary policy and deregulation helped bring on the current slump. "We are learning from it that we need a more active and intelligent government to keep our model of a capitalist economy from running off the rails," Posner writes. "The movement to deregulate the financial industry went too far by exaggerating the resilience—the self-healing powers—of laissez-faire capitalism." Posner also accuses professional economists, including some of his Chicago colleagues, of being "asleep at the switch." In September, he came out as a Keynesian; in a long piece in *The New Republic*, he hailed "The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money," which John Maynard Keynes published in 1936, as a "masterpiece," saying that "despite its antiquity, it is the best guide we have to the crisis."

As acts of betrayal go, this was roughly akin to Johnny Damon's shaving off his beard, forsaking the Red Sox Nation, and joining the Yankees. Ever since Milton Friedman, George Stigler, and others founded the Chicago School, in the nineteen-forties and fifties, one of its goals has been to displace Keynesianism, and it had largely succeeded. For three decades after the Second World War, economics was dominated by Keynesian ideas about how the government should use monetary and fiscal policy to prevent slumps. Since 1974, however, more than a dozen scholars associated with the U. of C. have been awarded the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences; in the areas of regulation, trade, anti-trust law, taxes, interest rates, and welfare, Chicago thinking greatly influenced policymaking in the United States and many other parts of the world. Keynes appeared to have been consigned to history.

But in the year after the crash Keynes's name appeared to be everywhere; several books were published about him, and policymakers again embraced his ideas. Until the banking crisis erupted, Posner hadn't bothered to investigate "The General Theory." When he picked it up, he was greatly impressed by the economic insights and practical detail it contained. "Even though it is kind of loose—it doesn't dot all the 'i's and cross all the 't's," Keynesian economics "seems to have more of a grasp of what is going on in the economy," Posner said to me. Much of

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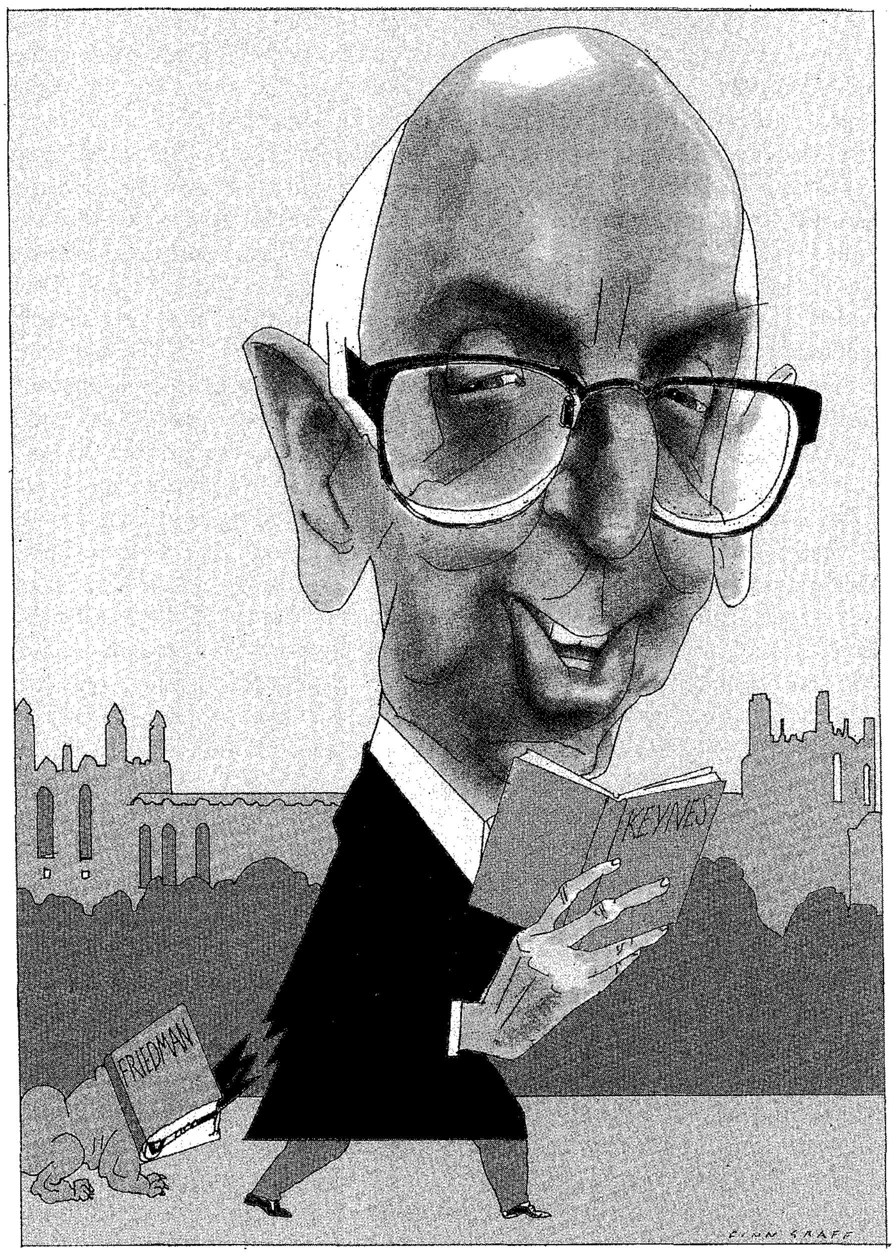
modern economics, by contrast, is "on the one hand, very mathematical, and, on the other hand, very . . . credulous about the self-regulating power of markets. That combination is dangerous."

In "A Failure of Capitalism," Posner singles out several economists, including Robert Lucas, one of Friedman's most eminent successors, and John Cochrane, another prominent Chicago economist, for failing to appreciate the magnitude of the subprime crisis. During our conversation, Posner questioned the entire methodology that Lucas and his colleagues pioneered. Its basic notions were the efficient-markets hypothesis, which says that the prices of stocks and other financial assets accurately reflect all the available information about economic fundamentals, and the rational-expectations theory, which posits that individuals and firms are hyper-intelligent decision-makers who have a correct model of the economy in their heads. In rational-expectations theory, the economy is represented in very simplified and spare fashion. Many models, including some relied on by the Fed and other central banks, don't even feature banks or other financial intermediaries. In Posner's view, older, less dogmatic theories better explained how the problems in the financial sector dragged down the rest of the economy. "Of course, you have to know a lot about banking, and that was not the case with economists," he said. "Odd, in a way, because macroeconomists and finance theorists have always been interested in banking, but I don't think they really understood a lot about it."



Richard A. Posner has shocked the Chicago School by joining the Keynesian revival.

Although Posner was unfailingly polite, I detected an edge of anger in his comments about the economics profession and its embrace of such patently unrealistic theories. I asked what he thought economists had learned from the past two years. "Well, one possibility is that they have learned nothing," he replied slowly. "Because—how should I put it—because market correctives work very slowly in dealing with academic markets. Professors have tenure. They have lots of graduate students in the pipeline who need to get their Ph.D.s. They have techniques that they know and are comfortable with. It takes a great deal to drive them out of their accustomed way of doing business."

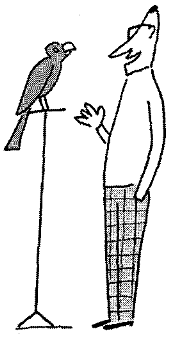
After leaving Posner's office, I drove south to the University of Chicago's Hyde Park campus, which for more than half a century has been a thriving hub of conservative thought and disputation, housing thinkers as diverse as Leo Strauss and acolytes in political philosophy, Albert Wohlstetter and his fellow Cold Warriors in nuclear strategy, and Posner, Richard Epstein, and others in law. The archetypal Chicago intellectual—embodied by Ravelstein, the chain-smoking professor of political philosophy who appears in Saul Bellow's 2000 novel of the same name—has combined an interest in big ideas with urgent engagement in current affairs. Last fall, as the financial crisis intensified, many Chicago economists halted their own research to concentrate on the moment. "Everybody here was blindsided by the magnitude of what happened," James Heckman, whose work on labor economics and statistics won him a share of the 2000 Nobel Prize, told me. "But it wasn't just here. The entire profession was blindsided." Conferences were organized, seminars were held, and faculty lunchrooms were full of vigorous debate. One panel session at which half a dozen prominent Chicago economists discussed "The Future of Markets" drew more than a thousand people to a Sheraton downtown. "Everybody got involved," Eugene Fama, a veteran finance specialist at the university's Booth School of Business, said. "Everybody's got a cure. I don't trust any of their prescriptions."

In the course of a few days, I talked to economists from various branches of the subject. The over-all reaction I encoun-

FINN GRAFF

tered put me in mind of what happened to cosmology after the astronomer Edwin Hubble, in 1929, discovered that the universe was expanding, and was much larger than scientists had believed. The profession fell into turmoil. Some physicists stuck to the existing theories, which posited a stable universe. Others, Albert Einstein included, tried to adapt the old models to Hubble's data. Still others attempted to come up with a new account of how the galaxies formed; it was this effort that ultimately produced the theory of the big bang.

Fama, whom I interviewed in his office at the Booth School, was firmly in the denial camp. A short, wiry man of seventy, with cropped hair and wearing a short-sleeved flowery shirt, he looked more like a retired marine in Miami Beach than like one of the founders of modern finance. Beginning in the nineteen-sixties and seventies, Fama, who holds the title of Robert R. McCormick Distinguished Service Professor of Finance, propounded the efficient-markets hypothesis, which underpinned the deregulation of the banking system championed by Alan Greenspan and others. I asked him how this theory had fared in the recent crisis, which many, myself included, have described as an example of gross inefficiency. Fama was unruffled. "I think it did quite well in this episode," he said, traces of his native Boston audible in his voice. "Stock prices typically decline prior to a recession and in a state of recession. This was a particularly severe recession. Prices started to decline in advance of when people recognized that it was a recession and then continued to decline. That was exactly what you would expect if markets are efficient."



The emphasis that Fama placed on the stock market surprised me. Surely, I said, we had experienced a giant credit bubble, which eventually had burst. "I don't know what a credit bubble means," Fama replied, his eyes twinkling. "I don't even know what a bubble means. These words have become popular. I don't think they have any meaning." Fama wasn't kidding. He became so tired of seeing the word "bubble" in *The Economist* that he didn't renew his subscription. "People have become entirely sloppy," he went on. "People have jumped on the bandwagon of blaming financial markets. I can tell a story very easily in which the financial markets were a casualty of the recession, not a cause of it."

The crux of Fama's argument was that the economic slowdown predated the collapse of the mortgage market, in 2007. As job and income growth slowed, he said, some homeowners couldn't make their monthly payments, especially the subprime borrowers who had taken out the riskiest mortgages. With delinquencies and foreclosures rising, banks and other financial institutions that had invested heavily in subprime-mortgage bonds suffered big losses, which prompted them to cut back their lending to others. "As a consequence, we had a so-called credit crisis," Fama said. "It wasn't really a credit crisis: it was an economic crisis."

Fama's story was logically consistent, but it appeared to contain a big gap. If the mortgage blowup didn't cause the recession, what did? When I raised this question, Fama laughed. "That's where economics has always broken down," he said. "We don't know what causes recessions. Now, I'm not a macroeconomist, and I don't feel badly about that." He cackled again. "We've never known. Debates go on to this day about what caused the Great Depression."

A theory of the economic downturn that relies on inexplicable gyrations in the economy didn't sound like a great advance, but Fama seemed content with it. He insisted that the real culprit in the mortgage mess was the federal government, which instructed Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac to buy subprime mortgages and mortgage securities. "That was a government failure; that was not a failure of the market," Fama said. According to figures quoted in the Washington *Post*, Fannie and Freddie's purchases accounted for less than a third of the subprime market at the height of the boom. When I pointed out that private investors bought most of the subprime securities issued, and the two big government-backed mortgage companies considerably less, Fama said simply, "How much does it take?"

In addition to accusing the government of causing the subprime problem, Fama argues that it botched its handling of last fall's financial crisis. Rather than bailing out A.I.G., Citigroup, and other firms, Fama says, the Treasury Department and the Federal Reserve should have allowed them to go bankrupt. "Let them all fail," he said, with another laugh. "We let Lehman fail. We let Washington Mutual fail. These were big financial institutions. Some we didn't let fail. To me, it looks like there was not a lot of rhyme or reason to it." He conceded that the entire financial system might well have shut down for a period, but he expressed confidence that investors and healthy banks would have stepped in to buy the good assets of the collapsed firms, and that, within a week or two, the system would have been operating again. "It pretty much stopped for a week or two, anyway," he said. "The credit markets stopped for *more* than a week or two."

Fama was no less genial on the subject of Posner. "He's not an economist," he said. "He's an expert on law and economics. We are talking macroeconomics and finance." Even when I brought up Paul Krugman, who had criticized efficient-markets thinking in a recent essay in the *Times Magazine*, Fama's equanimity was unshaken. "My attitude is this," he said. "If you are getting attacked by Krugman, you must be doing something right."

In the office next to Fama's, I encountered another true believer, John Cochrane. During last year's financial turmoil, Cochrane, who happens to be Fama's son-in-law, helped to organize a petition against the Treasury Department's seven-hundred-billion-dollar Troubled Asset Relief Program; more than forty Chicago economists signed it. "What is there about recent events that would lead you to say markets are inefficient?" he said to me. "The market crashed. To which I would say, We had the events last September in which the President gets on the television and says the financial markets are near collapse. On what planet do markets not crash after that?" Earlier this year, Cochrane wrote several articles arguing that the Obama Administration's stimulus package lacked a theoretical basis. When I brought up Posner and the broader Keynesian revival, he insisted that Keynesian economics had been plagued for decades with logical inconsistencies, which recent events had done nothing to remove. "We threw it out for a reason," he said. "It didn't work in the data. When inflation came in the nineteen-seventies, that was a major failure of Keynesian economics."

After talking to Fama and Cochrane, I understood what Posner meant when he said that his opponents were "sticking to their guns." (Robert Lucas refused to see me, saying in an e-mail, "I don't want to do this.") Elsewhere, however, I found more willingness to acknowledge errors and seek new ways forward. "There are a lot of things that people got wrong, and I got wrong, and Chicago got wrong," Gary Becker, who won the Nobel in 1992, said when I caught up with him late one afternoon. "You take derivatives and not fully understanding how the aggregate risk of derivatives operated. Systemic risk: I don't think we understood that, either—at Chicago or anywhere else. Maybe some of the calls for deregulation of the financial sector went a little too far, and we should have required higher capital requirements. Although that was not just Chicago. Larry Summers"—the Harvard economist, who is now President Obama's top economic adviser—"when he was at Treasury supported deregulation."

Becker is famous for extending economic analysis to areas such as education, crime, and family behavior—he has gone so far as to suggest that having children is driven partly by financial considerations. At the age of seventy-nine, he still teaches three graduate courses; notes were piled up on his desk, next to a twenty-inch iMac. A major cause of the crisis, he said, was that Wall Street financial engineers devised a series of new instruments that neither they nor the people who traded them fully understood. In the housing market, buyers had unrealistic expectations about future price gains, and a bubble formed. "Yeah, markets aren't fully efficient," Becker said, with a wave of his hand. "But the general thrust that markets are more efficient than any alternative—that aspect I don't think is going to be changed." He added, "I don't see China, or Brazil, or a lot of other developing countries making any radical changes in their movements toward the market, and I think for good reason."

Unlike some of his colleagues, Becker believes that the federal government did a pretty good job of reacting to the financial crisis, both in extending trillions of dollars to frozen credit markets through the Federal Reserve and in bailing out the big banks. "I don't accept the view that in this crisis we should just have let everything fall where it may," he said. "Yeah, the economy would have picked itself up, but it would have been a much more severe recession."

Becker writes a popular economics blog with Posner, where the two of them have debated Posner's late-life conversion. When I brought it up, Becker said that Posner wasn't the only apostate; the revival of interventionism had led him to believe that ninety per cent of economists had been Keynesians all along but had been too afraid to admit it. Still, he conceded, Posner and others had raised fair critiques of Chicago economics: "Some of the models that were being promoted in macro didn't turn out to be that useful in helping us to understand what to do to combat a major recessionary event."

That sounded like a criticism of Lucas, whose office was just down the hall. In Lucas's rational-expectations theory, the economy is self-regulating. If in one period a shock—a big rise in the price of oil, for instance—causes output to fall and unemployment to rise, in the next period the economy automatically adjusts back to a state of full employment. The explanation for long stretches of mass unemployment, such as the Great Depression, is that workers refuse to accept lower-paying jobs and prefer to remain out of work. In such a world, most forms of government intervention are inherently futile. When I asked Becker about Lucas, he said that his colleague had made "a major contribution" to economic theory (he won the economics Nobel in 1995), but suggested that Lucas's followers might have erred. "Some people did rule out the whole financial sector, seeing money as being unimportant," he said. "I think that stuff just turned out to be wrong." James Heckman, one of five current faculty members to win the economics Nobel, was more explicit in his criticism of Lucas's methods, and he told me that Friedman, who died in 2006, had also been skeptical of them. During the seventies, Heckman recalled, he and Friedman took part in the oral examination of a Ph.D. candidate whose thesis employed rational-expectations techniques, which were then sweeping the field. In the course of the examination, Friedman turned to Heckman and said, "Look, I think it's a good idea, but these guys have taken it way too far."

By Chicago standards, Heckman is a centrist; his research on preschool educa-

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tion and other issues has influenced both Democrats and Republicans, and during the 2008 Presidential election, the Obama campaign asked him to assess its education proposals. But, like most of his colleagues, he places a great deal of emphasis on incentives and has expressed skepticism about many government programs. "I think the underlying ideas of the Chicago School are still very powerful," he said. "The base of the rocket is still intact. It is what I see as the booster stage—the rational-expectations hypothesis and vulgar versions of the efficient-markets hypothesis—that has run into trouble. I think what happened is that people got too far away from the data, and confronting theories with data. That part of the Chicago tradition was neglected."

If the economic equivalent of a big-bang theory is to emerge, it will almost certainly come from scholars much less invested in the old doctrines than Fama and Lucas. Ambitious tenure-track professors at Chicago, like their rivals at other schools, are busy trying to incorporate into their theorizing previously neglected facets of reality, such as banking failures, financial-market bubbles, and credit crunches. This research presents a formidable challenge. A big reason that rational-expectations models proved so alluring to economists was their tractability: with some clever math and a computer, they could be "solved out" to generate explicit solutions for important economic variables, such as unemployment and inflation. Adding institutional detail complicates things greatly; so does allowing for psychological factors, such as overconfidence. "People say economics needs to incorporate the insights of psychology," Cochrane said to me. "Great, thanks! I've heard that from Bob Shiller"—a well-known Yale economist, who wrote the 2000 book "Irrational Exuberance"—"for thirty years. Do it! Let's see a measure of the psychological state of the market. That's hard to do."

In the nineteen-sixties and seventies, Chicago economics was largely cut off. Other leading schools, such as Harvard and Berkeley, rarely hired Chicago graduates, and Chicago returned the favor. Today, the gap is much narrower, partly because many of Chicago's ideas have been incorporated into mainstream thinking, and partly because it has recruited more widely. The most famous Chicago economist today is Steven Levitt, an M.I.T. Ph.D. and the co-author of "Freakonomics," who is known for innovative empirical studies of crime, abortion, and teacher performance. Richard Thaler, one of the creators of behavioral economics, which seeks to combine the insights of psychology and the rigor of economics, moved to Chicago fifteen years ago; his office is now around the corner from Fama's. In the old days, Fama recalled, "Chicago economics was basically under attack the world over. There was a type of bunker mentality. But now we've become more confident."

Fama and Thaler may be friendly—the two occasionally play golf together—but their analysis of the financial crisis and its aftermath could hardly be more different. Fama clings to the idea of efficient markets; Thaler takes the view that in the past ten years the U.S. economy has experienced two ruinous speculative bubbles, and that policymakers ought to focus on ameliorating them. "I think we know what a bubble is," he said. "It's not that we can predict bubbles—if we could, we would be rich. But we can certainly have a bubble warning system." Such a system would focus on standard valuation measures, such as price-to-earnings ratios for stocks and price-to-rent ratios for housing. If these warning signs start flashing, Thaler went on, the government should rein in speculative activity, by, for example, raising lending requirements in overheated real-estate markets. "God did not say, 'Thou shalt be able to borrow one hundred per cent of the price of a house,' " he added.

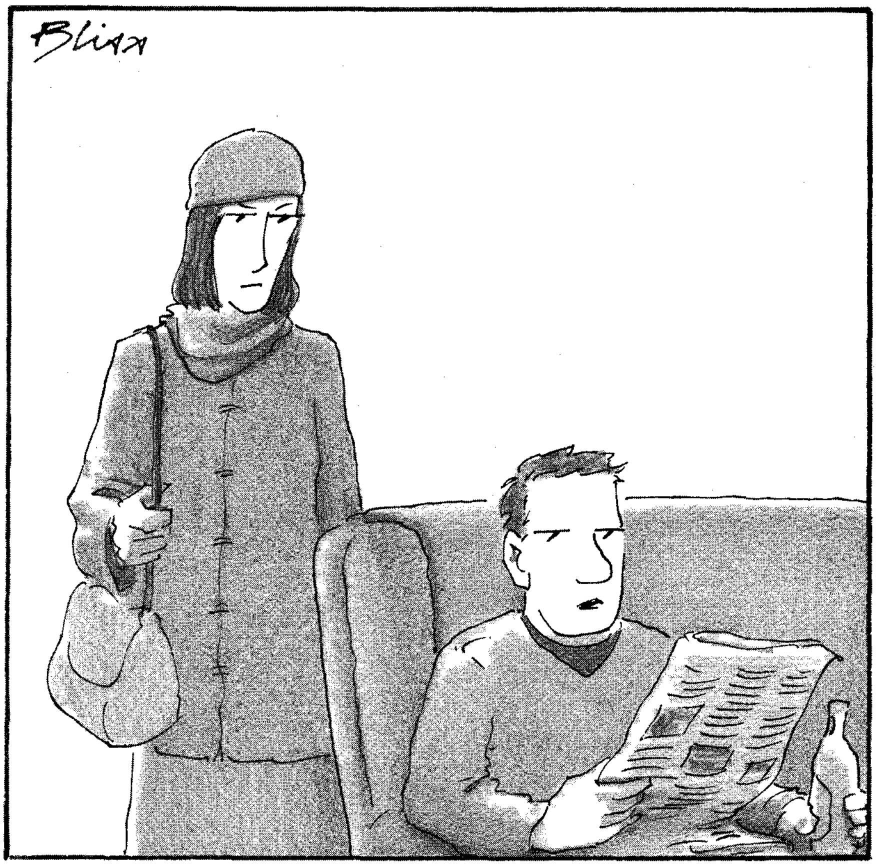
To Thaler, the key causes of the financial crisis were high leverage and human frailty. Many of the home buyers who were taking out subprime-mortgage loans didn't know what they were doing, he insisted, and Wall Street C.E.O.s failed to understand what their traders were up to. "Go down the list—A.I.G., Citigroup, Bear Stearns, Lehman. All of these companies were destroyed or devastated by a small part of the business that was hurtling forward and risking the entire firm. The people in charge were greedy or stupid, or possibly both."

At Chicago and elsewhere, behavioral economists have elucidated many activities that appear to contradict rational-choice theories. So far, however, they haven't converted these insights into a workable model of the economy as a whole. A useful new economics will need to integrate an awareness of human nature with extensive practical knowledge and high-level mathematical expertise. In an office a floor above Fama's, I met with Raghuram Rajan, a forty-six-year-old Indian-born scholar who is one of the few economists who warned about the dangers of a financial crash. At a conference organized by the Fed in 2005, he said that deregulation, trading in complex financial products, and the proliferation of bonuses for traders had greatly increased the risk of a blowup. Senior Fed officials and other prominent economists dismissed his concerns. Lawrence Summers said that Rajan's critical tone supported "a wide variety of misguided policy impulses."

Rajan, with his colleagues Douglas Diamond and Anil Kashyap, has for years been examining potential problems in the banking sector. The work of this group didn't attract much public attention, but it turned out to be very useful to policymakers and other economists in analyzing the credit crisis and formulating the government's response, which Rajan supported. "Research drives thinking, and there is all sorts of research being done here," he said. "People at the extremes get a lot of press—people who say, 'Let's not do anything, let's liquidate.' . . . There are people at Chicago who hold that view. There are others who understand that the banking system is a lot more important than, and different from, most corporations. Yes, you can close down some banks without a problem, but there are some banks that are so intertwined that you don't have an option."

Rajan, who worked from 2003 to 2006 as the chief economist at the International Monetary Fund, has experience with financial blowups in developing countries, where irresponsible macroeconomic policies, poor supervision, and crony capitalism—banks extending reckless loans to influential people—often distort economic behavior. "The whole point about development is that you deal with some of these problems," Rajan said. "You don't have populist extensions of credit. You don't have banks going haywire." In some ways, Rajan went on, the subprime crisis resembled earlier collapses in Southeast Asia and Latin America. "You can't pin it all on Greenspan," as many have done. "It is a systemic breakdown, and we need to look more broadly at why it happened."

In a new book he is working on, entitled "Fault Lines," Rajan argues that the initial causes of the breakdown were stagnant wages and rising inequality. With the purchasing power of many middle-class households lagging behind the cost of living, there was an urgent demand for credit. The financial industry, with encouragement from the government, responded by supplying home-equity loans, subprime mortgages, and auto loans. (Notwithstanding the government's involvement, this is ultimately a traditional Chicago argument: in response to changing economic circumstances, the free market provided financial products that people wanted.) The side effects of unrestrained credit growth turned out to be devastating—a possibility that most economists had failed to consider. "The fault of the economics profession was not so much rational expectations, which is a convenient and useful device," Rajan said. "It was to ignore the plumbing. Economists could afford to do that for a long time because the plumbing didn't back up. Now that the plumbing has backed up, you find that loans aren't really made in a pure, pristine market. Things can break down."



"I'm not anti-social; I'm just at a point in my life where I find all your friends really, really annoying."

• •

Twelve months ago, it appeared that history had turned against laissez-faire economics. Even among the Chicago faithful, there was reluctant acceptance that, if politicians were unwilling to let big banks fail, stricter financial regulation was needed to prevent further taxpayer bailouts. Fama and Becker both endorsed limits on bank leverage, so that bankers are playing with more of their firm's own money. Cochrane called for a breakup of big financial firms, such as Citigroup and Goldman Sachs, with their trading activities being separated from the banking services they provide to customers. Rajan and Kashyap, meanwhile, advocated reforms in the compensation packages of Wall Street traders and C.E.O.s.

Today, though, the political and financial environment is somewhat different. Thanks to government action on an enormous scale, the banking system has been stabilized and the U.S. economy is expanding, if at a moderate pace. Ironically, the rescue program has taken some of the heat out of the economic debate. In Chicago, as elsewhere, most economists have returned to their own research projects. "If this recession had got a lot worse, we would have seen two major things," Becker said to me. "Much more government involvement in the economy and a lot more concentration in economics on understanding what went wrong." Assuming that the economic recovery continues, he went on, "there will be nothing like the revolution in the role of government and in thinking that dominated the economics profession after the Great Depression."

Becker may be right, but the impact of the financial crisis shouldn't be underestimated, especially for Chicago-style economics. "Rational expectations and strong views of efficient markets have taken a terrific hit," Posner pointed out to me. "Keynes is back, and behavioral finance is on the march." Outside of Fama and his followers, it is hard to find anybody, even in Chicago, who believes that speculative bubbles aren't a serious problem, or that the U.S. economy automatically adjusts to full employment. And even most of the diehards now support efforts to regulate Wall Street more effectively.

Posner, in a new book he is working on entitled "The Crisis of Capitalist Democracy," reiterates his call for economists to embrace some of Keynes's original ideas, and questions the U.S. government's ability to pay off its vast debts without resorting to inflation. Before I left Posner's office, he gave me a brief history lesson. By the late nineteen-eighties, with the collapse of Communism, the basic insights of the Chicago School about deregulation and incentives had been accepted worldwide, he recalled, and the bitter enmity between Chicago and its rival economics departments had faded. Eventually, many of the founders of the Chicago School died, and were replaced by more moderate figures, such as Thaler and Levitt. Now, largely as a result of misguided efforts to extend deregulation to the finance industry, we have experienced the biggest economic blowup since the nineteen-thirties. Posner, who appeared to be enjoying his new role as a heretic, paused, then said, "So probably the term 'Chicago School' should be retired." ♦

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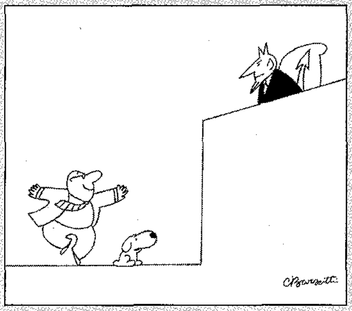

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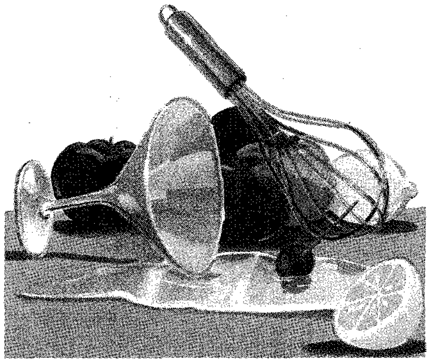
Chop chop chop chop chop chop chop chop chop chop chop chop chop chop chop chop chop chop clatter chop skitter crash bang—FUCK!

Stir stir stir stir stir stir stir stir stir stir stir stir stir stir stir stir stir stir stir stir skid bang skitter bang crash—SHIT!

Hello. For those of you who don't know me, I would like to apologize for my brief outburst there at the beginning, but I am the Cursing Mommy, and occasionally I do blurt curses, break crockery, give people the finger, and hurl objects to the floor. Well, all I can say about that is, anyone who can make a Bolognese sauce and not get a bit flustered has my heartfelt admiration! I expect we've seen the last of that behavior today, however, as I turn to one of my favorite dishes, a delightful and relaxing seafood risotto in the Venetian style.

Whipping up a risotto is a marvellous way to give a sense of occasion to an intimate dinner party, because of the careful timing that is required, and the pinpoint attention to detail right up to the moment of serving. If done correctly, every risotto will be unique, its own irreproducible concoction. That's the fun of a risotto, you see! In order to pull off this feat of cookery, the chef must be completely relaxed, and to that end I like to start with a robust Chianti such as I am pouring here, forestalling any necessity of immediate repouring by using an ample glass like this snifter-type thing in which my ten-year-old recently brought home two goldfish after some kind of a project at his school. (Don't ask me where the goldfish are.) A little more than halfway full should be fine.

At some point in your past, all of you have no doubt been under pressure to prepare a dinner party in which everything is really special and "just so." As it happens, that is the very situation I find myself in tonight, when the party will be for only six—two other couples besides Larry and myself. The men are both clients of Larry's, and Larry, who is as a rule somewhat worried, anxious, and useless when it comes to almost anything, has been talking rather wildly about how he's going to be fired and we'll end up on the street. I know, and you know, that this is another of Larry's whiny manipulations that his mother was always dumb enough to fall for and I'm not, but, in any case, this dinner party seems to be sort of mandatory, which means the risotto had better be up to par. Now, you may ask, will Larry himself be around during the preparations for this important dinner party?



ZOHAR LAZAR

Well, actually, no. Larry will not—*beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-*

As you see, when I set out to make a delightful seafood risotto à la vénitienne, I always like to get off on the right foot at the very beginning by HAVING THE FUCKING GODDAM SMOKE DETECTOR GO OFF!!! Fucking goddam piece of useless stupid garbage—what could have set it off? The steam from the fucking dishwasher? *beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-*

Thankfully, this is nothing I can't deal with, because I have learned in past encounters with this lousy piece-of-shit smoke detector that although I cannot turn the fucking thing off once it starts, because it is the ridiculous battery-less kind or something, all I have to do is stand on a chair, remove it from its ceiling-attachment thing, and take it down to the basement, as you observe me doing now. Then I simply place the smoke detector here in the corner, and bury it under an enormous heap of bedding near where my son has his TV. *beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-*

Ah, that's better. . . . No, it's not. Because, as I stand here once again in the kitchen, I notice that the stupid fucking smoke detector can still be heard. The sound is faint, but definitely still quite annoying, and enough to distract me, or any skilled cook, from the concentration necessary to pull off a high-maintenance dish like risotto. Luckily, though, I have just the solution for that: my Three Tenors CD, which I was planning to play anyway! I'll put on the Three Tenors, let them take me to sunny Sicily or wherever the hell, and drown the fucking smoke detector the hell out. Larry's new CD player, which I have already plugged into the kitchen outlet here—is there a CD already in it? why won't it open?—if I push this—no—fucking goddam stupid Larry can't even get a CD player that works for shit—*beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-*

All right—you know what I am going to do? I'm going to drain off the last little bit that's left in my snifter, pour myself a nice big refill, imagine a lovely and relaxing tropical vacation scene, and scream "FUCK!" at the top of my lungs. Then I am going to go back down to the basement, get one of Larry's hammers, and "disable," as they say, the smoke detector. Meanwhile, I will leave some onions browning in a skillet here on the left front burner so as to have a head start on my risotto when I return.

[*Pause.*]

beep beep beep beep beep CRASH SMASH CRUNCH POP SMASH *beep*

With that little detour behind us, we can now proceed to the preparation of the lovely bits of fresh seafood—the shrimp, squid, and snow crab—which we are going to add to the risotto when the time is right. I begin by giving the seafood a thorough cold-water rinse, like so, and then—*beep be...e...e...p, bip*—

What was that? *bee bee beep beep, bip, b'b'b'b', beeeeeeee. . . .*

Those of you who have followed this column for any length of time know that once in a while, at moments of extreme frustration, the Cursing Mommy gets so totally fucking fed up that she starts to scream curses, say what a stupid fuckhead that fuck Dick Cheney was, and generally let off a good cursing out all around. But now the Cursing Mommy is older and wiser, and she's not going to do that today . . . unless . . . what's that smell? Was that stupid smoke detector trying to tell me something? JESUS CHRIST, THE FUCKING BURNER UNDER THE ONIONS HAS SET THE PAPER TOWELS ON FIRE! OH, GOOD GOD! THE WHOLE FUCKING ROLL IS GOING UP! NOW THE CURTAINS ARE ALSO ON FIRE!! Oh, where's that fire extinguisher? Behind the basement door? Yes! Thank God! But what is this pathetic drizzle it's spraying? AHH! I'LL HAVE TO SMASH THE FIRE OUT WITH THE EXTINGUISHER ITSELF! *smash smash smash shatter smash crash crush shatter smash*

[*Pause.*]

After a vigorous session in the kitchen, I often like to relax and recharge by taking what I call a "mini vacation," as I'm doing now. I simply recline on my back on the kitchen floor with my feet in the bottom tier of my cookbook shelves, my head propped against the useless spent fire extinguisher, and a clean dish towel, moistened with cool water, across my forehead and eyes.

Then I drift away in my mind to some far-off place and take some deep breaths to expel the remaining acrid and possibly toxic smoke from my lungs. Let Larry deal with this shit when he gets home. He can call Gianelli's for takeout and put it on whichever one of our credit cards still works. I'm not even going to think about it. I would look forward to a future when we will be living in our car if I thought it meant that then I wouldn't have to cook, but you know what? I will still have to cook. . . . O.K., I know people are coming. In just a minute I'm going to get up. *beep...beep...beep...beep...beep*

Oh, what a fucking terrible day this has been.

Look for the Cursing Mommy's next column, "Get Out of My Fucking Lane, You Fuck: Defensive Driving Tips from the Cursing Mommy," which could be along pretty soon, depending. ♦

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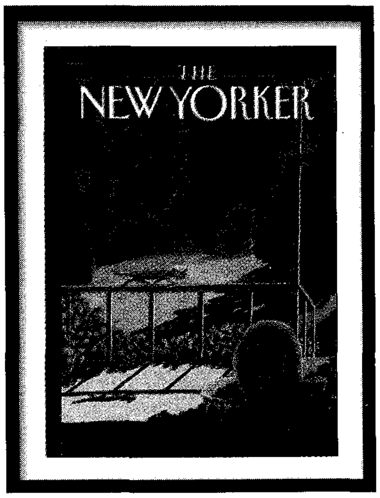

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ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

WATER MUSIC

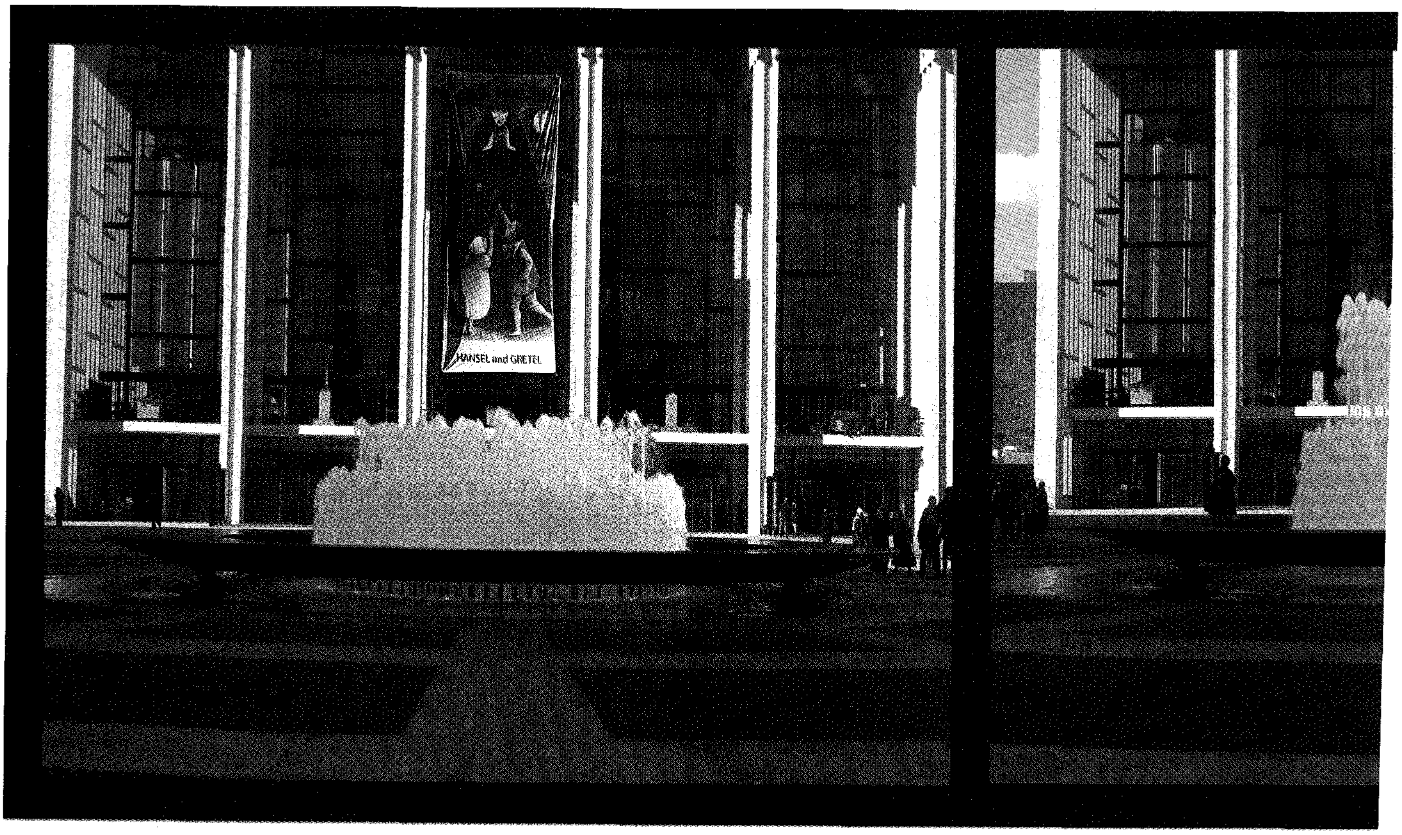
The fountain architect who gave water a voice.

BY JOHN SEABROOK

When Philip Johnson designed the main plaza at Lincoln Center, in the early sixties, he imagined a glowing, pulsating column of water at the center, a feature that would give the modernist piazza, he once said, "the focal point a fireplace gives a home." The result was the Revson Fountain. When it opened, in April, 1964, it was the most technically advanced fountain New York had ever seen; the *Times* thought it might be "the most sophisticated blending of light and water in this country," noting that the nozzles and the lights were controlled by "computer programmed tapes." In the fountain's signature move, a six-foot-wide column of frothy water rose into the air, brilliantly illuminated from below. When the pumps were abruptly shut off, the water appeared to float in the air. If architecture is frozen music, as Goethe said, then the Revson was liquid architecture. It quickly became an icon of the city.

But over the years the fountain's powers diminished. In hydraulic terms, it lost "head"—vertical thrust—mainly as a result of leaky valves, which is the way fountains, like people, tend to fail. The movies document this sad decline. In "The Producers" (1968), one can see the Revson in its prime, when Gene Wilder celebrates his new partnership with Zero Mostel by prancing around the watery eruption, but from "Manhattan" (1979) to "Ghostbusters" (1984) and "Moonstruck" (1987) there is an observable loss of potency. By the time of its appearance in "Sweet Home Alabama" (2002), the fountain looked ragged, and was out of commission for stretches of time—just another clever modernist idea that didn't last. The drained basin of the fountain, with its exposed plumbing, gave the plaza the focal point that a toilet gives a bathroom.

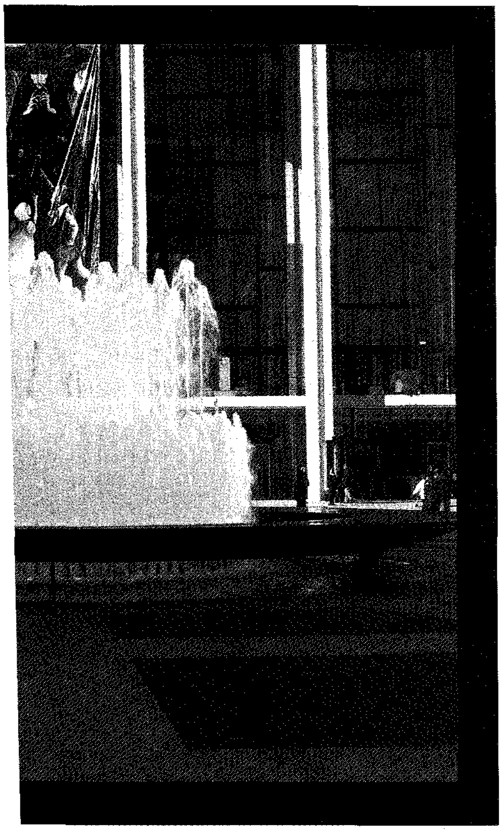
In 2006, Lincoln Center launched a $1.3-billion redevelopment project, and among the many improvements to the arts complex—two additional restaurants, a roof garden, two groves, and a new approach from Broadway—was a plan for a new fountain. There was never any serious discussion about trying to fix the old one, Reynold Levy, the president of Lincoln Center, told me recently. "It was like the decision to replace an old mainframe computer with a P.C."—a no-brainer. There was, however, "a great deal of discussion about what the new fountain should be." The firm Diller Scofidio + Renfro, the lead designers of the redevelopment plan, came up with a number of options, including moving the fountain off center and, instead of a circular fountain, creating a linear strip of water. But in the end, Levy told me, "everyone agreed that the fountain was properly placed, and was the right size, and people should still be able to sit at the edge, on the gran-



The renovated Revson Fountain, at Lincoln Center, can fire water as high as sixty feet into the air. Photograph by Eve Sonneman.

ite pedestal." Diller Scofidio did replace Johnson's monolithic granite base with a thin granite disk that rests on slender steel supports—a significant improvement—and lower the water level in the fountain's basin to match the level of the pavement.

The fountain's innards would be gutted and rebuilt. To accomplish that, the architects proposed bringing in WET Design (WET stands for Water Entertainment Technologies), the Los Angeles-based water-features firm, led by Mark Fuller. Fuller, who is fifty-eight, may be the closest thing the world has to a fountain genius. He and his colleagues at WET, which he co-founded in 1983, have brought a new language to fountain architecture by giving the water itself a voice: playful, mischievous, sometimes bombastic, sometimes serene. In the United States, WET's projects include Fountain Place, in Dallas, in which water squirts from tiny holes in the pavement, draining through narrow slots into a "vanished pool" below the surface; the Grove at Farmers Market, in Los Angeles, a sort of liquid cornfield, in which the stalks are made of water; the kinetic water-sculpture fountain in the McNamara Terminal at Detroit Metro Airport, which emits water sparks; and the double row of water plumes outside the Brooklyn Museum. Among other things, WET has extended the tradition of the fountain as trickster, a player of water games, which the Italian Renaissance fountaineers mastered, and which they employed to great effect at Villa d'Este, in Tivoli, outside Rome.



But WET is best known for the fountains at the Bellagio hotel and casino in Las Vegas, which Steven Spielberg has called "the greatest single piece of public entertainment on planet Earth." These fountains, which occupy the better part of an eight-and-a-half-acre lake, are programmed to dance to particular tunes—"Singin' in the Rain," which was created by the choreographer and director Kenny Ortega, is a crowd favorite. WET also did the spectacular water features that are part of the volcano at the Mirage, just down the Strip from the Bellagio. More recently, WET built the Dubai Fountain, which opened in May, and is the biggest fountain in the world. It can project painted images on its water forms, and blast water fifty stories high.

Lincoln Center wasn't in the market for a fountain like that. "We made it clear that we were not looking for a thirteenth art form at Lincoln Center," Levy said. "And we are not Las Vegas. We didn't want something that would take away from the 8 P.M. curtain." Was there any interest in making the fountain musical, like those at the Bellagio? "No music," Levy said firmly. "Because that wouldn't have been appropriate."

Diller Scofidio presented some renderings of tasteful waterworks that reassured the board, and, Liz Diller, one of the firm's principals, said, "we went to see WET's headquarters, in California, and we were very impressed. It was obvious they were the best qualified for the job." The Revson Foundation contributed four million dollars to the cost of the renovation. In early 2007, Lincoln Center decided to get WET.

Mark Fuller is compact and energetic, and has a worried air about him; it often seems as if he's working out a problem in the back of his mind, even as he's talking about something else. He has stocky fingers that twitch sometimes when he talks, as if he were itching to take something apart, and his posture is slightly stooped, as if from years of leaning over a

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workbench. In demeanor and appearance, he looks like an engineer, but there's a showman inside Fuller, and his alter ego comes out in his dancing fountains.

He grew up in a family without much money, on the outskirts of Salt Lake City. In the spring, when the snow began to melt, water would rush down the sloped streets, and Mark would make elaborate networks of snow dikes, sluices, and spillways for the water to flow through. Disneyland opened in Anaheim, California, in 1955, and Mark made his first visit, with his parents, when he was fourteen. The park made a lasting impression on him; he was particularly enchanted by the underwater submarine ride and the Jungle Cruise. As a teen-ager, Fuller built a miniature jungle cruise in the back yard for the family's goldfish, complete with lagoons and underwater tunnels, using an old washing-machine motor to propel the water through the system. He even constructed his own underwater lights. "Here I was, fooling around with a hundred-and-twenty-volt current, in water, but nobody seemed concerned," he said.

In high school, Fuller was interested in theatre and, recognizing that in "appearance and stature I was not Charlton Heston," he channelled his theatrical impulses into sets and props. At the University of Utah, he studied civil engineering while continuing to do set design—for Aeschylus' "Agamemnon," he created an altar that breathed fireballs—in an effort to unite his seemingly disparate interests. An opportunity came after one of his professors showed the class a 16-mm. film that demonstrated laminar flow, a well-known principle in hydraulics.

In an ordinary garden hose, the water flow is turbulent. Water molecules bounce off one another chaotically, moving at different velocities, under changing pressure. When the water is projected out of the nozzle, it splinters into spray. In a laminar stream, the molecules all flow in the same direction, and surface tension binds the water as it emerges from the nozzle into a glassy rod that holds together, like a laser beam, and looks heavier, ropier, and wetter than water in a turbulent-flow stream. "How cool is that," Fuller recalled thinking as he watched the film in class.

For his senior honors thesis, Fuller decided to build a laminar-flow fountain. He and two other seniors engineered it by running water from a garden hose through a large plastic cylinder that was stuffed full of drinking straws. As the water passed through the straws, the turbulence diminished, and was further quieted as it passed through first one small mesh screen and then a smaller one, so that when it emerged from the nozzle it flowed in a smooth rod. A friend's father agreed to install the thesis fountain—the world's first permanent laminar fountain—in the atrium of his new office building, the Conquistador, in Salt Lake City.

After two years of graduate school at Stanford, Fuller applied for a job at Disney, and for his interview he took along slides he had made of his laminar fountain. "They looked at it and said, 'We definitely want to hire you—we're just not sure as what,'" Fuller recalled. He became an "Imagineer," charged with developing new ideas for Disney's theme parks. After a year of working on rides at Disneyland, he moved to Epcot Center, in Orlando, the park intended to embody Walt Disney's dream of science, technology, and design working together to create a better world. Fuller designed the first "leapfrog fountain," in which laminar streams jump from one raised planter to another. In order to complete his work in time for Epcot's opening, Fuller did not sleep for the last four days. Later, his colleagues had buttons printed that said, "I kept up with Mark Fuller at Epcot."

In 1983, Fuller and two partners started WET. Fuller was still at Disney, but he left the following year to work full time on creating Fountain Place, in Dallas. The company struggled at first; at one point, Fuller had maxed out thirteen credit cards. In 1995, he got a call from Steve Wynn, the casino developer. Wynn was planning the Bellagio, and he wanted it to be a place that would "make you forget you were in Vegas," he told me recently, in a hoarse voice, during an early-morning phone call. "I thought an incredible fountain could do that. My landscape guy, Don Brinkerhoff, said, 'You got to look at this fountain that this kid did at Disney.' So we went down there and looked at it. It wasn't a big thing, but Mark figured out how to do the laminar streams, and how to light them, and I was pretty impressed with that. So I flew him to Vegas and took him to dinner, and I said, 'Can you build me something that's never been seen before?,' and I told him the scale I wanted it on, and that it had to all be coördinated with music—the sound, light, and water all together, a perfect union. Fuller said he could do it. He said

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ARS POETICA: THE FOXES

What will make it red as that one
years ago by the woodpile, a fox that loitered
as though in revelation's flames for
a telltale whiff of rodent beneath the snow?
Not these windfall apples hard as cue balls
in the cold, not even that pumpkin I recycled
to its plot as too big and stringy for a pie,
folded now into a white turban. Snow
is on the ground this January dusk,
and this fox, flat black and gray,
no burning bush, walks without hurry
among the fruit trees, then behind the shed,
and is gone. Barely a fox at all, barely more
than a tremor of wind in the bushes
behind the orchard, it needs a tidbit
of cottontail or field mouse, the under-shed
holdouts against January, small
and blooded, to stagger its foxprints
too fastidiously placed.

—Brendan Galvin

he could make the lake dance and throw water up two hundred feet in the air."

"I assured Steve that it would be like nothing else on earth," Fuller told me. He got the job.

To create the Bellagio fountains, Fuller employed water cannons he had invented that use compressed air to fire shots of water—"Shooters," he called them. They were far more efficient than mechanical pumps at lifting large amounts of water into the air. He also realized that he needed to invent a new kind of nozzle, with a broad range of motion. To visualize the shapes that such a nozzle would make, he had one of his engineers put on a raincoat and hold a hose in different positions above his head, while he twirled around on a spinning chair. Fuller came up with an underwater robotic arm that was attached to a nozzle and could move in three dimensions. The nozzle could sweep forward and back, creating fan shapes, and it could twirl, creating cones; the engineers, by changing the position of the nozzle and the velocity and acceleration of the water, could create countless variations. Fuller called the units "oarsmen," because of the rowing motion the nozzles made.

A robotics company called Sarcos, in Salt Lake City, agreed to build the oarsmen for twelve thousand dollars apiece, but, after unforeseen design and engineering challenges, they ended up costing more than twice that amount. Fuller borrowed as much money as he could to make up the difference. When it looked as if he might go bankrupt, Wynn loaned him the two million dollars it would cost to finish the job, on condition that Fuller refrain from building a fountain for any other casino in Las Vegas until he had repaid him. (Fuller paid back the loan several years ago.)

A WET designer named Claire Kahn choreographed one of the first programs, to Aaron Copland's arrangement of "Simple Gifts," and Ortega did another, to "Singin' in the Rain." Ortega told me, "You try to make the water hear the music." The Shooters fire to the staccato beats in the music, and the oarsmen sweep through the legato movements. The choreographers first worked up short sequences on the computer, using a program called VirtualWET, and then "put it on the lake," Ortega said. Unlike dancers, he added, "fountains don't talk back, but they do break down sometimes."

When Wynn saw the fountain for the first time, in 1998, performing Ortega's piece, he was overcome: "I'll never forget that moment. Within sixty seconds I knew—this is it. It was the most incredible feeling." Since then, millions have been similarly moved by the Bellagio fountains. "There's something extraordinarily emotional about that fountain," Ortega told me. "The water is so alive—it is life. And people get very emotional around it. You see people crying—just overwhelmed by the spectacle."

The WET campus comprises eleven buildings in an industrial section on the border of Burbank, near the airport. The building that houses the WET design staff looks like any busy architect's office: the designers, many of whom trained as architects, are seated before computer screens, using software to produce geometric forms and shapes, which will be rendered not in concrete and steel but in water. WET designers often visualize the individual nozzles in a fountain, Fuller told me, as pixels. "We work with basic forms," he said. "Lines and circles, mainly. We don't make, say, cloverleafs. Out of these simple geometries we create complex patterns, but it always starts with simplicity." It is up to the engineers and the fabricators to design and build the plumbing, wiring, circuitry, and software that will sculpt the water into the shapes the designers have conjured up. And because a Fuller fountain isn't a sculpture with water—the water *is* the sculpture—everything else in the fountain is hidden, usually under the water itself, which adds immensely to the engineering challenges.

In the Idea Playground, WET's R. & D. lab, men in white lab coats try to make water do things it has never done before. Water is heavy, and fountain designers through the ages have been preoccupied with finding ways to counter the effects of gravity. The ancient Romans figured out how to use gravity to their advantage, by forcing water into fountains from high aqueducts; the weight of the down-rushing water created the head. During the Renaissance, the ancients' hydraulic innovations were rediscovered, and the Popes restored and embellished the fountains of Rome, commissioning the great sculptors of the day, who used water to give their figures the liquid glue of life. In the nineteenth century, mechanical water pumps began to be used in fountains, which made fountaineering easier, and today anyone with an electrical outlet can run one in his back yard. But in form and function mechanical fountains didn't change much until WET came along and invented the compressed-air cannons to conquer the problem of gravity. WET makes five standard sizes—NanoShooters, which have a range of up to six feet; MicroShooters, which can go up to sixty feet; SuperShooters, a hundred and twenty feet; HyperShooters, two hundred and forty feet; and XtreamShooters, which can fire water five hundred feet into the air.

Outside the lab, I saw a demonstration of a SuperShooter. Its barrel was about twelve feet tall, held upright by metal supports. One of the lab workers used a remote control to fire the Shooter, while we stood back. A shuddering boom was followed by a crackling sound, as the water flew high overhead.

"That's the sound of water breaking the sound barrier," Fuller said, looking pleased.

Nearby was a mockup of an ice fountain, one of the water features that WET developed for the Las Vegas CityCenter, an $8.5-billion hotel and entertainment complex that opened in December. Out of an opaque black pool, columns of ice up to two feet wide appear, illuminated by colored lights, rising at varying speeds until they are as high as fifteen feet. "It's supposed to be somewhere between the column in the Stanley Kubrick movie '2001' and a big Popsicle," Fuller told me. As the ice columns emerge from the pool, they are sculpted by tiny, high-powered water jets. "It's like a dot-matrix printer," Fuller said. "It lets you create all these complicated shapes." Every so often, the ice columns are retracted and extruded again, and sculpted into different shapes.

Some of the most beautiful effects I saw in the lab were the quietest. I watched a three-quarter-inch-wide laminar tube of water transcribe a fifteen-foot arc without breaking up, lit from within by a colored beam of fibre-optic light that bends with the water. When that stream obliquely struck another stream, a shower of colored water sparks bloomed.

Although water is WET's stock-in-trade, the firm dabbles in fire, too. "There is a lot of demand for fire in the East," Fuller said. I saw several fire-and-water mockups, including a twister of water in a large glass tube, which had fire running through the middle of it. Another fire feature sprayed a mixture of natural gas and water. One of the lab technicians put his hand into the plume, explaining that as long as you kept your palm perpendicular to the floor you wouldn't get burned, because the water carries the fire over your hand. "But if you put it flat you'd fry," he said.

The new Revson Fountain was constructed entirely on site at WET, as are all the company's fountains, with precision German steel-cutting tools operated by WET employees. "Outsourcing wouldn't make sense for us," Fuller said, "because with this kind of work there are so many small changes to make along the way." The fountain has three hundred and seventeen computerized jets, some of which produce turbulent, frothy water, and others glassy waterspouts. Jets are arranged in two rings around the perimeter of the fountain, with radial arms leading to a central circular mass of more jets. These are run by twenty-four water pumps. (The old Revson had a total of three pumps.) Distributed evenly among the jets are thirty-six MicroShooters.

WET also designed the new pump room, which is beneath the plaza, and which contains, among other things, huge air tanks for the MicroShooters, built of high-grade steel in order to contain the air inside, whose pressure is a hundred pounds per square inch. "If one of these blew, you wouldn't find much more than a teaspoon of us," Fuller said, during a tour of the facility. The windowless area, which takes up twenty-two parking spaces in the underground garage, feels like a submarine, and if you're down below when one of the MicroShooters goes off you feel as if you were in battle. (The fountain technicians wear ear protection.)

A WET choreographer named Peter Kopik designed two programs for the fountain. There is a daytime program—a sedate, ninety-minute sequence of slowly morphing geometric shapes—and a shorter, more dramatic evening program, in which the MicroShooters are deployed along with the jets. The daytime program will run most of the time, and the dramatic program is intended to run later, as the plaza begins to fill with ticket holders.

Fuller seems a little frustrated at the constraints Lincoln Center placed on him to insure that the fountain wasn't too "Vegas." "Whatever that means," he said. "You know the expression 'sugarcoating the lemon'?" he asked me, with a somewhat rueful expression. "I feel like we're lemon-coating the sugar." Neither his oarsmen nor the big Shooters had made it into the final design; incorporating the thirty-six MicroShooters had required a certain sleight of hand. "No one told us we *couldn't* use them," he said.

The new fountain débuted on October 1st, and the daytime program has been running since then. When the jets are all on, they produce a mighty column of water that slowly rises to a height of twelve feet. When the column is at its greatest height, there are four hundred and seventy-five gallons of water in the air, all of it recycled. The glossier streams in the middle can be glimpsed through the stalks of froth on the outside. Especially after dark, people are drawn to the column of water, mesmerized by the two hundred and seventy-two L.E.D. lights that make the water glow white (colored gels could be added to the lights, but that would presumably be considered inappropriate) and hushed by the sound of the cascade.

The dramatic program, however, has not gone off nightly. Adjustments needed to be made to the wind sensors that had been installed around the plaza. While WET has mastered water, and is working on fire, it is powerless against the effects of wind. With so much water propelled so high in the air, even a slight breeze could push some of it beyond the rim of the Revson's basin. A dousing might feel good on a hot summer day, but it would probably not delight an elderly couple dressed for the ballet on a chilly fall evening. The fountain as trickster is one thing; the fountain as potential lawsuit is another. It seems that Lincoln Center, in spite of its best efforts, might have got more fountain than it bargained for.

I was finally able to see the dramatic program on a cool, almost breezeless evening at the end of October. Kerry Madden, Lincoln Center's taciturn vice-president of concert halls and operations, whose responsibilities include overseeing the fountain, met me in the plaza. He was on his cell phone, surrounded by three cops, and they all scrutinized the fountain as though looking for signs of suspicious intent. Finding none, Madden and I went upstairs to the outdoor balcony of Avery Fisher Hall, while, below, a guard steered people away from the downwind side of the fountain, just in case.

"Let's go with the show," Madden said tersely into his phone, speaking to the operator in the pump room.

The show began with the rising column seen in the daytime program, but soon the first shots appeared, and the booming of the air cannons was heard, faintly at first, and then louder, as the shots climbed higher. As the crest of one shot began to fall back to earth, it struck the next shot, on its way up, and created globes, like Japanese lanterns made of water, momentarily suspended in the air.

"That's about twenty feet," Madden said, when the first shots went off. Down in the plaza, a crowd was gathering. "That's about forty," he said, excitement breaking into his no-nonsense tone.

Then there was the biggest boom yet, and all the Shooters went off at once, sending water sixty feet into the air—almost as high as the surrounding buildings—and as the main plume arced down there was a loud slapping sound of water landing outside the basin, on the plaza itself.

But nobody minded. When the volley ended, and the fountain's waters abruptly disappeared, there was a short, stunned silence, followed by bellows of approval from the crowd, which were, under the circumstances, entirely appropriate. ♦

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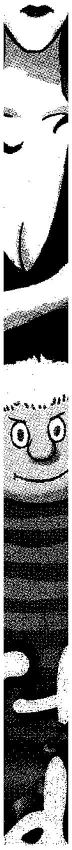
The Revson Fountain, then and now.



PROFILES

NUMBER NINE

Sonia Sotomayor's high-profile début.

BY LAUREN COLLINS

On October 6th, at 10 A.M., Neal Katyal, an attorney for the Department of Justice, rose in front of the Supreme Court to argue the government's position in the matter of United States v. Stevens. Standing at a mahogany lectern, surrounded by marble friezes of lawgivers—Draco, Hammurabi, Marshall—Katyal began his address, which, he announced, would amount to a four-pronged defense of Section 48 of Title 18 of the federal criminal code. The law, which Congress passed in 1999, had been intended to restrict certain depictions of animal cruelty. Chief among them were "crush videos," in which small animals such as guinea pigs, kittens, hamsters, birds, and mice are taped or tied to the floor and—as a congressional report put it—stomped to "a bloody mass of fur" by women, often wearing spike heels, who "can be heard talking to the animals in a kind of dominatrix patter" ("What's wrong, little man? Are you scared?"). The acts shown in the videos—"The Tales of Charlie's Ankles," "Smush"—were already illegal, but prosecutors had found it nearly impossible to identify the participants in the videos, and thus to enforce the existing laws. Congress responded by targeting the images, making it illegal, with some artistic and educational exceptions, to "knowingly create, sell, or possess . . . for commercial gain . . . any visual or auditory depiction . . . in which a living animal is intentionally maimed, mutilated, tortured, wounded, or killed."

The law went unenforced until January, 2003, when Robert J. Stevens was arrested at his home, in Pittsville, Virginia. Stevens owned a business called Dogs of Velvet and Steel, and operated a Web site, pitbulllife.com, through which he sold dog-training paraphernalia and documentary films about pit bulls. Three of the films incorporated footage of dogs fighting. The government did not allege that Stevens had anything to do with staging or filming the fights. But, under Section 48, a jury found that his production and distribution of the films was criminal, and sentenced him to thirty-seven months in prison. An appeals court overturned the verdict.

The Stevens matter, having reached the Supreme Court, was shaping up to be one of the biggest cases of the term. In briefs, the government, along with animal-rights groups, asserted that depictions of animal cruelty were of such grievous harm to society that they—like depictions of child pornography, which the Court had prohibited with its decision in New York v. Ferber (1982)—were not shielded by the Constitution. Stevens's lawyers, joined by an unlikely alliance of gun advocates and civil-liberties organizations, argued that the law infringed upon "a broad swath of never-before-regulated speech." The case was a First Amendment depth bomb. If the Court upheld the statute, it would create a new category of unprotected expression for the first time in twenty-seven years.

At the lectern, Katyal began to speak. "First, like the statute at issue in New York v. Ferber, this statute only reaches depictions of cruelty to actual living beings—animals, not simulated ones or the written word," he said. "Second, the statute only applies to commercial messages, ones that Congress found drove the market for animal cruelty. Third, the statute examines the work as a whole—"

A blunt, glottal voice cut in. "What record do you have of that fact?" Justice Sonia Sotomayor asked.

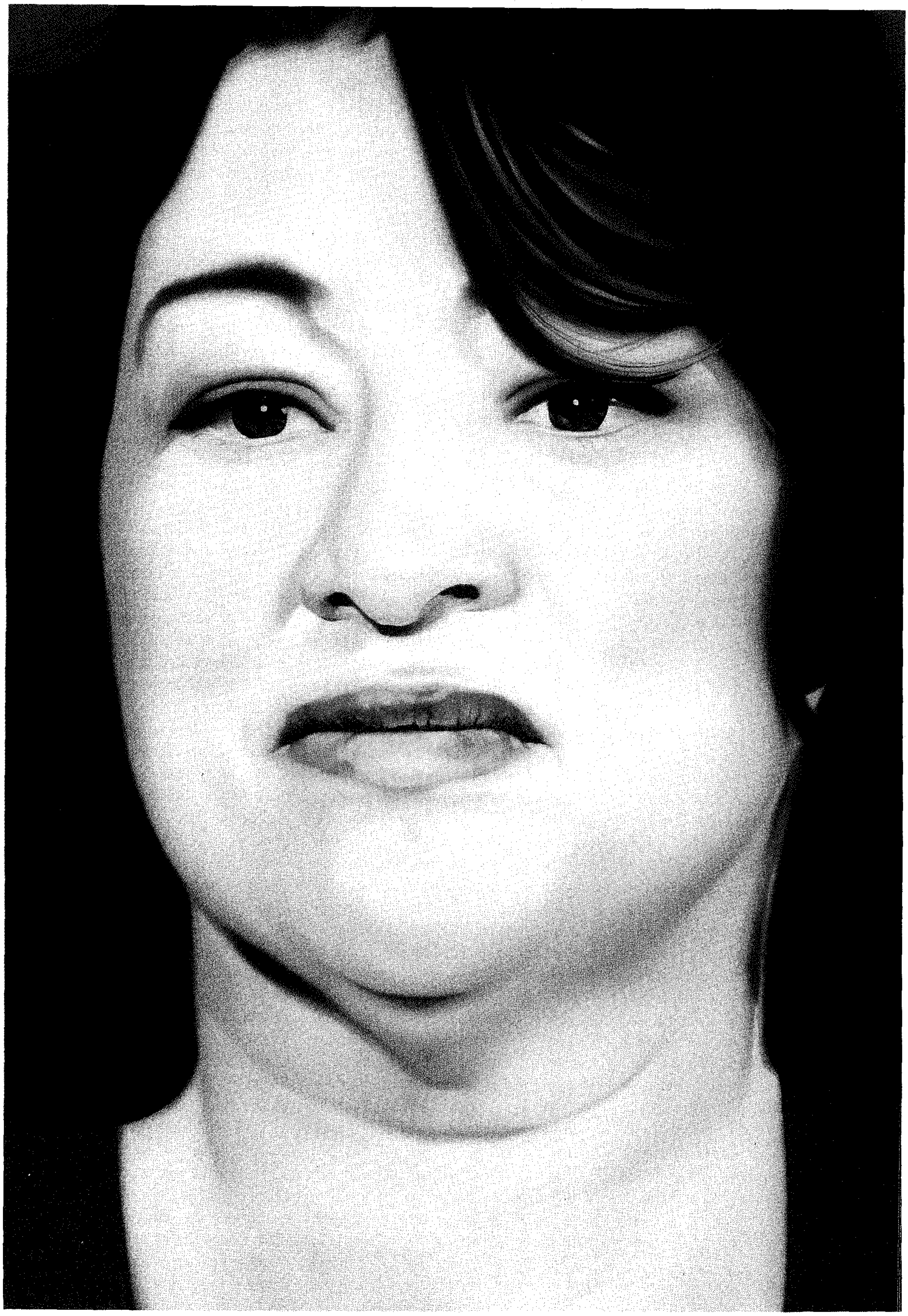
Sotomayor—pitched forward, drinking from a thermos—wanted to know about the market for dog-fighting videos. Katyal assured her that it was robust. A few Justices registered points before Sotomayor jumped in:

> SOTOMAYOR: Could you tell me what the difference is between these videos and David Roma's documentary on pit bulls? I mean, David Roma's documentary had much, much more footage on the actual animal cruelty than the films at issue here. . . . In this film, the respondent didn't let the video show the actual tearing of the jaw. . . . So isn't, doesn't there have to be a judgment inherent in this statute?
>
> KATYAL: The line will sometimes be difficult to draw, just as it's difficult to draw in child pornography—
>
> SOTOMAYOR: But it's not in child pornography, because, there, Congress says the very act—it doesn't matter how artistic it is. That very act of child pornography is illegal.

By the end of the hour allotted to the case, Justice Sotomayor—wearing a snaky silver cuff bracelet and with her fingernails painted sports-car red—had spoken five times. The day before, in the Court's opening session, she had spoken thirty-three times, more than any other Justice. In contrast to some of her peers, who pondered historical parallels (Justice Antonin Scalia: "What about a new Adolf Hitler?") or posed absurdist hypotheticals (Justice Samuel Alito: "Suppose you have the Ethnic Cleansing Channel on cable TV?"), she took a nudgy, earthbound approach ("What do you mean by 'even-handed,' please?"). She did not traffic in punch lines or brainteasers. Her hypothetical was an actual. You could imagine Sotomayor, who had ditched the frilly jabot she had worn in her official portrait (a gift from Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg), becoming curious about pit-bull documentaries and calling up some David Roma clips on YouTube to check them out for herself.

When President Obama announced her nomination, on May 26th, it was clear that Sotomayor—who, two weeks later, fractured her ankle running late at LaGuardia—would be a different kind

Sotomayor believes in the perfectibility of systems. She has a gift for challenging authority without invoking its wrath.



RIYAS KOMU, AICON GALLERY

of Justice, someone a little more connected, as the White House kept reminding everyone, with "the real world." She was a *boricua* from the Bronx, a diabetic, a divorcée, a dental-bill debtor, a person who, the night before her investiture ceremony, belted out "We Are Family" in a karaoke bar at a Red Roof Inn. ("It was all Titi Sonia's idea," her cousin Marisol Gutierrez told *Latina*.) The financial-disclosure form that she filed with the Senate revealed that, in 2008, in a Florida casino, she had won $8,283 playing cards. Scalia, a few years earlier, had become embroiled in a conflict-of-interest drama after going on a duck-hunting trip with Dick Cheney; Sotomayor once recused herself from a case because, she wrote, "I was a member of the BJ's Wholesale Club Inc." Whether her name was pronounced Soda-mayer (Senator Jeff Sessions), Soto-my-ur (Senator Richard Durbin), Soto-my-air (Senator Al Franken), or Soto-may-ay-or (Senator Tom Coburn), she cut a relatable figure. The Bronx congressman Jose Serrano said that, after her nomination, "people on the street would come running up to me and talk about 'Sonia,' like she's their cousin, or their niece."

Sotomayor's mode of expression can be inelegant. Her writings are marked less by any special rhetorical force or philosophical clarity than by a prosaic approachability. In Farrell v. Burke (2006), she invoked Carrie Bradshaw: "The State's definition of pornography as material depicting sexual conduct and 'designed to cause sexual excitement,' if applied, would cover not only materials such as *Scum* but also popular television shows such as 'Sex and the City.' " But all the talk about her love of salsa dancing and pigs' feet was filler. It did not reveal, or guarantee, that she would behave in a certain way on the bench, or that, even if she did, she would not in time be transformed by the unpredictable alchemy of the Court. Her jurisprudence, up to her Supreme Court début, had been fairly liberal, but her methods varied: strict textualism, allusions to international law, nods to the legislative record.

Sotomayor's questions in her first week on the bench established her as the Court's most exuberant rookie interrogator since Scalia, who, in 1986, had irked Justice Lewis Powell by hogging the floor. ("Do you think he knows that the rest of us are here?" Powell had whispered to Justice Thurgood Marshall.) As a judge on the Second Circuit Court of Appeals, in New York, Sotomayor had been known for her collegiality. Some people were surprised to see her coming on so aggressively in her new role. "As someone who totally loves and adores her, I think she should kind of take it slow at the beginning," a former clerk of Sotomayor's told me. Like a transfer student who picks a fight on the first day of school, Sotomayor seemed to be showing that she was not to be taken—as she variously had been, in the months leading up to her début—for a pushover, a token, or a slouch. She would not be cowed by the pomp of the setting—the velvet draperies, the spittoons—nor would she be inhibited by the Court's finicky codes of seniority and decorum. "In Sonia's mind, there is no time for a learning curve for a Justice," her friend Alex Rodriguez, a management consultant, told me. "She feels she has to fill that ninth seat on Day One."

Latino leaders began laying the groundwork for a Sotomayor nomination almost as soon as President Obama was elected. During the Administrations of George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton, Latino groups had repeatedly failed to coalesce around a candidate. This time, they were determined to wield their influence as a bloc. In January, Nydia Velázquez, the Democratic congresswoman from New York's Twelfth District, was sworn in as the head of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus. She asked Sotomayor, a longtime friend, to come to Washington to administer the oath—and to insure that she was fresh in the mind of every Hispanic member of Congress.

At a Cinco de Mayo party at the White House, Velázquez and Serrano, who is of Puerto Rican descent, each buttonholed Obama.

"Mr. President, she's a very qualified person, and it would be a historic nomination," Serrano said.

Velázquez gripped Obama by both hands. "Mr. President, you have an opportunity, here in your hands, to shape the United States Supreme Court for years to come."

Obama whispered into Velázquez's ear and smiled. "I know—there's a Puerto Rican woman."

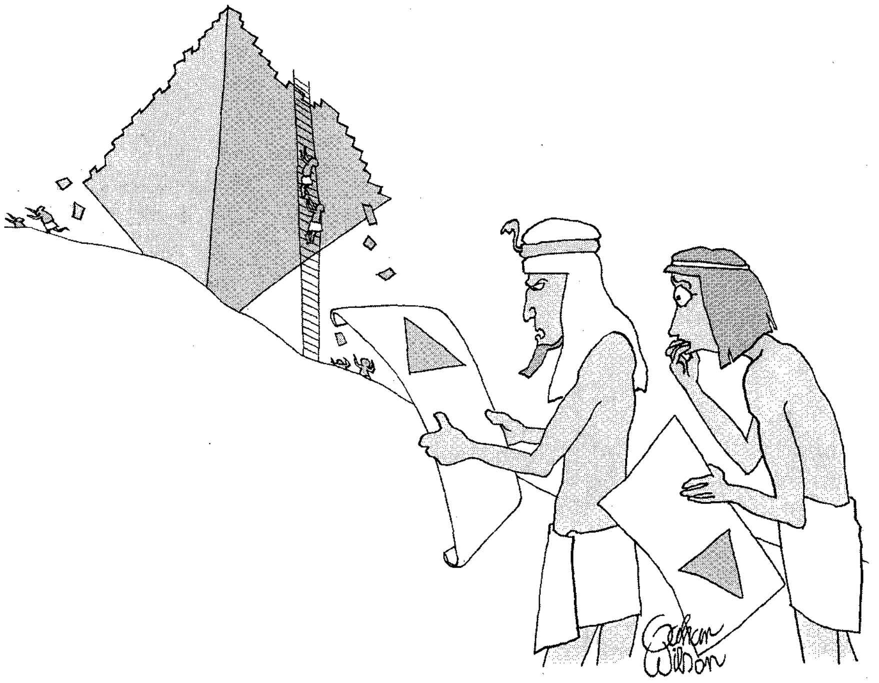
Justice David Souter announced his resignation on May 1st. Not long afterward, the Hispanic Caucus convened to formally endorse a candidate. The meeting was long and contentious. The Mexican-Americans did not have a superior candidate. The Puerto Ricans did not have the numbers. After hours of debate, Ed Pastor, a Mexican-American congressman from Arizona, made a motion: "The best candidate is Sonia Sotomayor, and we should take a vote right here." The meeting ended with a unanimous vote for Sotomayor.

Latino leaders also lobbied their black counterparts to the cause. "The concern of some people, and I believe some in the White House, was with what political capital they could use in nominating a Latina in terms of the black community, who feel that Clarence Thomas doesn't represent them," Velázquez said. On the House floor, Velázquez approached the North Carolina representative Mel Watt, who serves on the House Judiciary Committee, and who formerly chaired the Congressional Black Caucus. A few days later, Watt called Velázquez on a Saturday. "Nydia, I placed a call to the White House," he said. "I said, 'If there's not a black candidate that makes the short list, we will be supportive of Sonia Sotomayor.' "

By the third week of May, Obama had narrowed the list to four finalists: Diane Wood, of the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals; Elena Kagan, the Solicitor General; the Homeland Security Secretary, Janet Napolitano; and Sotomayor. Cynthia Hogan, the counsel to Vice-President Joseph Biden, was charged with running the nomination and confirmation process. Within her office, parlor handicappers considered Sotomayor, the only candidate the President did not know personally, to be at a disadvantage. An interview with Obama changed the odds. On May 26th, he announced her nomination, citing her "formidable intellect" and her "inspiring life's journey."

Despite Obama's praise, and photographs of Sotomayor's angelic mother, Celina Sotomayor, dabbing at her eyes during the press conference, the rollout got off to a slightly sour start. In early May, a widely read article by Jeffrey Rosen in *The New Republic*, entitled "The Case Against Sotomayor," had quoted an anonymous source as saying that Sotomayor was "kind of a bully on the bench," "domineering," and "not that smart." The piece generated six hundred and forty-two comments on the magazine's Web site, many of them incensed. Rosen eventually softened his criticisms, but the insinuations lingered. The day after the nomination was announced, Dana Milbank wrote in the Washington *Post* that Obama had opted for "biography over brain." Many of the potshots were glancing (Newt Gingrich Tweeting that Sotomayor was a "Latina woman racist"), but the perception that Sotomayor was a temperamentally and intellectually invalid candidate, posited largely by backers of other candidates during the selection process, had infiltrated the debate.

Sotomayor is not given to niceties. "She would go to senior people and tell them what the hell she felt," Steve Skulnik, a former colleague of Sotomayor's at the law firm Pavia & Harcourt, recalled. "I remember one lunch when she started lecturing one of the partners about how he wasn't billing clients as regularly as he should have been. That was sort of shocking to people at the table." In early December, during oral arguments for United Student Aid Funds Inc. v. Espinosa, Sotomayor cut off a lawyer as he attempted to answer a question posed by Justice Ginsburg. "Counsel, may I interrupt for just one moment, because I—there is something needling at me that I do need an answer to," Sotomayor said. According to Law.com, which reported on the incident in a story headlined "Sotomayor Collides with Ginsburg During Questioning," Justice Stephen Breyer turned to Sotomayor as though to intervene. Before he could, Ginsburg shot back, "And I'd like him to answer the question that I asked him first."



"I think I've spotted your problem."

A number of Sotomayor's colleagues on the Second Circuit and her former clerks acknowledged to me that she could be tough on the bench, but none of them said that they found her untowardly so. (Although Sotomayor is hard on lawyers, she is said to be unusually solicitous toward jurors.) Some of them suggested that her indelicate manner may be a consequence of professional necessity. A colleague on the Second Circuit suggested, "The way she is on the bench may come from having been a district-court judge, where you have to maintain control of the courtroom."

Some of the talk about Sotomayor's attitude may have amounted to lay misunderstanding of the nature of judicial interrogation, which on the Second Circuit—where each oral argument typically lasts only ten minutes—tends to be curt. But the slurs played into stereotypes: the dense lady-judge, the mouthy Latina. Judge Guido Calabresi, of the Second Circuit, told the *Times* that the charges were "sexist, plain and simple." In June, Ted Shaw, a former head of the N.A.A.C.P. Legal and Educational Defense Fund, and a high-school classmate of Sotomayor's, exclaimed to me, "She was at the top of our class, which was ninety per cent white. For those who suggest her intellectual background is not strong—well, all the white folks were below her!"

The Administration's strategy was to create a "broad-based" effort at "lowering the temperature" of the process. After the Congressional Hispanic Caucus meeting, Velázquez pondered whether to announce the results of the internal vote. "Some members said, 'If we don't use the influence of the caucus, and the President doesn't nominate a Hispanic, then the Hispanic community is going to say, "Where was the caucus?" ' " Velázquez recalled. In mid-May, she ran into Senator Charles Schumer, of New York, who sits on the Judiciary Committee, at Gracie Mansion. " 'Nyd, Nyd, I think we can do this,' Schumer said to me," Velázquez recalled. "I said, 'What do you think the C.H.C. should do?' and he said, 'Play low-key, like a low profile.' "

The Administration also enlisted what it called "outside validators." From 1979 to 1984, Sotomayor had been a prosecutor, a credential that Hogan's team seized upon. Robert Morgenthau, the ninety-year-old Manhattan district attorney, who resigned last week, became a fixture at press conferences. (He also testified at the confirmation hearing.) In June, Vice-President Biden, flanked by Morgenthau and the Miami police chief, John Timoney, told law-enforcement officials that Sotomayor "has your back." A week earlier, a first-person essay, written by Hugh H. Mo, who had supervised

Sotomayor in the D.A.'s office, appeared on Politico. Entitled "Real-World Experience Prepared Sonia Sotomayor," it detailed Sotomayor's role in obtaining a sixty-two-year sentence for a criminal known as the Tarzan Burglar, during "one of the worst crime sprees in a generation." The piece, Mo said, had been suggested by Stephanie Cutter, a White House communications adviser.

The Clinton prosecutor Kenneth Starr, whose wife knew Sotomayor, spoke in her favor. The White House worked with Louis Freeh, the F.B.I. director under Bill Clinton and, briefly, George W. Bush, to assure a number of Republican lawyers that, by supporting Sotomayor, they would not be isolating themselves politically. (Freeh had served with her as a district-court judge.) The strategy was astute. Conservatives were left grasping at Sotomayor's typos. Her speeches "misspelled proper names she should have checked," and included "at least one subject-verb disagreement," Matthew Franck wrote on a *National Review* blog. Serrano recalled, "I was concerned at the beginning, when I saw the onslaught of the right-wing radio stations and TV shows, but then I realized it wasn't universal. And I hate to say this, but, when I began to see judges and lawyers from her prosecutor days come out for her, they all had one thing in common—they were white males. So then I knew that we were going to do fine."

Before her confirmation hearings, Sotomayor paid courtesy calls to eighty-nine senators, the most of any Supreme Court nominee. "I had read news accounts of these anonymous comments, so I thought, What's she going to be like?" Senator Amy Klobuchar, of Minnesota, recalled. "It turned out she was incredibly engaging. She was ten minutes early and we ran into each other in the hallway. Most people would be, like, 'O.K., we're meeting in ten minutes,' but she looked at me, and she goes, 'I'm here already,' and I said, 'Well, do you want to come in?' "

Not every senator was charmed by Sotomayor. The day she broke her ankle, she kept an appointment with Senator David Vitter, a Republican from Louisiana. Vitter, Sotomayor later told a friend, was unwelcoming. As they were finishing their meeting, Vitter said, "I want to ask you—do you think if I was you, and I had made the wise-Latina comment that you made, that I would have deserved to be a Supreme Court Justice?"

Sotomayor replied, "If you had my record, yes."

Sonia Maria Sotomayor: born in 1954, to Celina, a telephone operator, and Juan, a tool-and-die worker who died when she was nine; sister of Juan (named for his father); possessor of the neighborhood's only set of encyclopedias; high-school valedictorian; Princeton graduate; law-review editor at Yale Law School; Morgenthau acolyte; corporate lawyer; district-court judge; savior of baseball; Supreme Court Justice whose life story has become the most widely disseminated, and parsed for meaning, since that of the maid's son from Pinpoint, Georgia. To David Brooks, writing in the *Times*, her story was a morality tale, epitomizing "the intoxicating lure of work." To Rush Limbaugh, it was a crock. Clarence Thomas, Limbaugh told his radio audience, "could teach Sonia Sotomayor about poverty, about single-parent households, about having to work multiple jobs, about not being admitted into a library to read in Savannah, Georgia." Obama, citing Oliver Wendell Holmes, framed Sotomayor's trajectory as a Bronx bildungsroman, the sort of journey that "can give a person a common touch and a sense of compassion; an understanding of how the world works and how ordinary people live."

In the Sotomayor household, the essential institution was not the government (Celina taught self-reliance) or the church (the family, St. Athanasius parishioners, were not especially devout) but the school (Juan, who is now an allergist in Syracuse, and Sonia did their homework at the kitchen table with Celina, who was studying to become a practical nurse). Sotomayor, a star student but not an autodidact, has remained close to her alma maters. She serves on the Princeton board of trustees, and, in October, she returned to Yale for her thirtieth reunion. Rudolph Aragon, a close friend from Yale, remembered her at their twenty-fifth: "She had intentionally lost twenty-five pounds, she had her hair done, she had her makeup done, and I said, 'Sonia, you look like a love goddess!' " Her senior-thesis adviser, Peter Winn, wrote, in the Washington *Post*, "She was not the best student I taught in my seven years at Princeton—though she certainly was high on the list—but she was the one who took greatest advantage of the opportunities there and emerged most transformed by her experience."

Sotomayor entered Cardinal Spellman High School, in the Edenwald section of the Bronx, in 1968. The school's two thousand students, strivers of assorted ethnicities, were mostly there at some sacrifice to their families. Sotomayor was a member of the debate team and the National Honor Society. She was not a member of Vaya, the Latino organization. During Sotomay-

"The dreams of avarice are coming back."

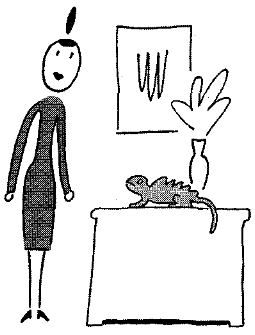
or's senior year, the school went coed. She ran for class president, losing to a girl named Doreen Frasca. The nuns—one was nicknamed Rigor Mortis—did not brook self-pity. One year, the school staged a father-daughter dance: Sotomayor and Lois Harr, another fatherless classmate, sat outside and collected tickets.

Sotomayor arrived at Princeton in 1972, several months after the graduation of her future colleague Samuel Alito. The atmosphere, a few years into coeducation and affirmative action (of which Sotomayor has said she was a beneficiary), was not one of unqualified comity. Alito, as a student, had belonged to a group called the Concerned Alumni of Princeton, whose founder once fondly recalled a time when the university was “a body of men relatively homogeneous in interests and backgrounds, who had known and liked each other over the years.”

As a freshman, Sotomayor roomed with Dolores Chavez, a Mexican-American from Albuquerque. They lived in the Walker Hall dormitory, close to the infirmary. “It was like a small-town girl meets this big-city-woman type of thing,” Chavez recalled. Chavez made curtains on her sewing machine. She introduced Sotomayor to tacos and played the folk song “La Paloma” on the guitar. Sotomayor invited her home to the Bronx. Chavez recalled, “First thing she said was ‘Dolores, you're from New Mexico. You smile way too much.’ ”

To supplement her scholarship, Sotomayor worked in the cafeteria. On the steam line, student employees were required to wear a blue button-down shirt with a dorky bow tie and a name tag. “The more juvenile of us would wear the bow tie halfway off, or have the shirttail out,” Nick Allard, who worked with Sotomayor, recalled. “Sonia would show up, wear it properly. It was clear that she had bigger fish to fry.”

Indifferent as she was to cosmetic indignities, Sotomayor, as a sophomore, led a group of Puerto Rican and Chicano students in filing a complaint with the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, charging the university, as she explained to the school newspaper, with relegating “an important cultural sector of the population to oblivion.” Her detractors have invoked her campus grievances to portray her as a radical separatist, but her activism, over the years, has been of a mild brand. In an era of effigies and occupations, Sotomayor wrote letters to the *Daily Princetonian*. Frustrated with the Man in New Jersey, she appealed to his counterpart in Washington. “I am not promoting ethnic segregation,” she said, years later. “I am promoting just the opposite: an ethnic identity and pride which impels us to work with others in the larger society to achieve advancement for the peoples of our cultures.” When some of her peers blockaded the entrance to the Institute for Advanced Study, because of a rumor that it worked on anti-personnel mines, they did not think to ask her to participate. “She would have said that it would not have a discernible effect on anybody's behavior, that it would alienate people,” Ken Moy, a friend at Spellman and at Princeton, recalled. “Sonia was always able to find the levers inside existing structures.”



Sotomayor has attempted not to demolish institutions but to transform them from within. She has an uncanny ability to challenge authority without invoking its wrath. Later in her sophomore year, she registered another grievance: Adele Simmons, the dean of student affairs, had not sufficiently consulted the members of a student advisory committee in selecting a new dean of minority affairs. “We're not here to play patsies, we're not a front,” Sotomayor, who had served on the committee, told the *Princetonian*. Her words were strong, and a little silly, but they did not alienate administrators. “It was always terrific when students asked to change things in ways that were doable,” Simmons recalled. In her senior year, the university presented Sotomayor with the M. Taylor Pyne Honor Prize, its highest academic award.

Sotomayor believes in the perfectibility of systems. Several of her former clerks attributed her impatience with unprepared lawyers to her reverence for the judicial process and her faith that, if it is administered meticulously, it will achieve the correct result. Clarence Thomas's experiences in the seventies caused him to embrace individualism; Sotomayor's made her an establishmentarian. She has a bit of a bureaucratic streak. When Princeton's administrators asked her to join the advisory committee to select the minority dean, she agreed to, but only as a formal delegate of Acción Puertorriqueña, a campus organization. Unlike Thomas, Sotomayor has wanted to be a representative of a group.

Sotomayor's deference to institutions is evident in some of her business jurisprudence. “SOTOMAYOR AND BUSINESS: ‘NO REASON . . . TO BE CONCERNED,’ ” a *Wall Street Journal* headline read in May. In the case In re Air Crash Off Long Island, NY, on July 17, 1996 (2000), she disagreed with her colleagues' decision to allow the families of the T.W.A. Flight 800 crash victims to sue the airline and Boeing. Although it was an “understandable desire” to permit the families to seek redress, she argued, such a lawsuit was prohibited by the Death on the High Seas Act and would “prevent certainty in the law.” The Republican-leaning Chamber of Commerce endorsed Sotomayor. Still, some business interests were alarmed by her comment, during oral arguments in Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission, the campaign-finance case that the Supreme Court heard in September, that the Court had perhaps erred in endowing corporations with many of the same characteristics and rights as people. (The Supreme Court emphatically rejected her attempt, as an appellate judge, to extend tort law to allow people to sue private corporations acting on behalf of the federal government.)

It was odd to hear Sotomayor portrayed as a radical: she married Kevin Noonan, a molecular biologist whom she had dated since Spellman, at St. Patrick's Cathedral in 1976, arriving at the ceremony in a white dress. (The couple, who had no children, divorced in 1983.) In 1977, she entered Yale Law School. There, she made law review with an esoteric note that examined a constitutional principle called the equal-footing doctrine in the light of the Puerto Rican statehood movement. If Puerto Rico became a state, Sotomayor asked, would it keep the mineral rights to surrounding seabeds? She forged a narrow compromise, asserting that, while equal footing prevailed under most circumstances, Congress was entitled to make certain exceptions. “She was navigating between two very difficult questions to find a practical, workable solution,” the Yale Law

School professor Stephen Carter, who edited the note, said.

Sotomayor spends a good deal of her time attending brown-bag lunches and judging moot courts. In 1980, she joined the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund—an affiliation that her opponents tried to milk for controversy but that, for a young, ambitious lawyer with an interest in Puerto Rican issues, was about as unusual as joining the Central Park Conservancy would have been for an environmentally minded one. In 1987, Sotomayor was appointed to the State of New York Mortgage Agency board; the next year, with Morgenthau's endorsement, she gained a seat on the New York City Campaign Finance Board. In 1986, she toured Israel with a group of Latino activists, a trip that, according to people close to her, she has spoken of as a seminal experience.

Sotomayor has built a sprawling network of friends, acquaintances, and colleagues much in the way of her opinions: diligently, and without any great flourish. "She's the last person you'd remember at a party," Rodriguez said—yet she seems to be the first person people remember at their weddings, their graduations, and the christenings of their children. (Sotomayor is a godmother to five children, including the son of her dentist.) In the nineties, she was engaged to a building contractor named Peter White, whom she addressed emotionally at her 1998 induction ceremony. "Peter, you have made me a whole person, filling not just the voids of emptiness that existed before you, but making me a better, a more loving, and a more generous person," she said. "You have altered my life so profoundly that many of my closest friends forget just how emotionally withdrawn I was before I met you." The end of the relationship was difficult for Sotomayor—"It's a little sad, but the time that I think I saw her the happiest was just when she had a few of us to dinner and she was still with White and they talked about the pasta they had cooked together," Judge Calabresi recalled—but her social life remains robust. Judge Rosemary Pooler, of the Second Circuit, told me, "It's hard to find interesting men who are at her level, but I'm pleased to say she has recently met some. And that's all I'll say about that!" Sotomayor and her circle take a casual barn-raising approach: one day, Sotomayor had offered to drive her friend Margarita Rosa's daughter to college, but the stuff didn't fit in Sotomayor's Saab convertible, so she called her friend Dawn Cardi, who drove in from Brooklyn with bigger wheels. When the mother of Judge Richard Wesley, Sotomayor's former colleague, died, Sotomayor appeared at the wake, three hundred and twenty miles from Manhattan.

SHOPPING FOR POMEGRANATES AT WAL-MART ON NEW YEAR'S DAY

Beneath a ten-foot-tall apparition of Frosty the Snowman
with his corncob pipe and jovial, over-eager, button-black eyes,
holding, in my palm, the leathery, wine-colored purse
of a pomegranate, I realize, yet again, that America is a country
about which I understand everything and nothing at all,
that this is life, this ungovernable air
in which the trees rearrange their branches, season after season,
never certain which configuration will bear the optimal yield
of sunlight and water, the enabling balm of nutrients,
that so, too, do Wal-Mart's ferocious sales managers
relentlessly analyze their end-cap placement, product mix,
and shopper demographics, that this is the culture
in all its earnestness and absurdity, that it never rests,
that each day is an eternity and every night is New Year's Eve,
a cavalcade of B-list has-beens entirely unknown to me,
needy comedians and country singers in handsome Stetsons,
sitcom stars of every social trope and ethnic denomination,
pugilists and oligarchs, femmes fatales and anointed virgins
throat-slit in offering to the cannibal throng of Times Square.
Who are these people? I grow old. I lie unsleeping
as confetti falls, ash-girdled, robed in sweat and melancholy,
click-shifting from QVC to reality TV, strings of commercials
for breath freshener, debt reconsolidation, a new car
lacking any whisper of style or grace, like a final fetid gasp
from the lips of a dying Henry Ford, potato-faced actors
impersonating real people with real opinions
offered forth with idiot grins in the yellow, herniated studio light,
actual human beings, actual souls bought too cheaply.

"Yes" is Sotomayor's default mode. She shows up. In 2008, at the behest of her friend Mari Carmen Aponte, she joined Belizean Grove—"a global constellation of influential women who are key decision makers in the profit, nonprofit and social sectors; who build long term mutually beneficial relationships in order to both take charge of their own destinies and help others to do the same," according to its mission statement. (The organization was inspired by the men-only club Bohemian Grove.) Last year, Sotomayor attended a group retreat in Lima. "We talked about our work lives and the sights in Peru," Helena Ribe, a World Bank executive who was assigned to be Sotomayor's "big sister," recalled. "Being middle-aged women without a partner, we had that connection, too." During Sotomayor's nomination, the club's membership policies drew criticism, and Sotomayor resigned. Still, she invited Susan Stautberg, the group's founder, to the White House reception after her swearing-in. In Lima, Sotomayor had participated in a panel discussion about constitutional law. No community-building activity was too corny or too tedious. "She wore her new member's boa and was bright and fun and asked good questions," Stautberg recalled. Afterward, Sotomayor approached Stautberg with an observa-

That it never ends, O Lord, that it never ends!
That it is relentless, remorseless, and it is on right now.
That one sees it and sees it but sometimes it sees you, too,
cowering in a corner, transfixed by the crawler for the storm alert,
home videos of faces left dazed by the twister, the car bomb,
the war always beginning or already begun, always
the special report, the inside scoop, the hidden camera
revealing the mechanical lives of the sad, inarticulate people
we have come to know as "celebrities."
Who assigns such value, who chose these craven avatars
if not the miraculous hand of the marketplace,
whose torn cuticles and gaudily painted fingernails resemble nothing
so much as our own? Where does the oracle reveal our truths
more vividly than upon that pixillated spirit glass
unless it is here, in this tabernacle of homely merchandise,
a Copernican model of a money-driven universe
revolving around its golden omphalos, each of us summed
and subtotalled, integers in an equation of need and consumption,
desire and consummation, because Hollywood had it right all along,
the years are a montage of calendar pages and autumn leaves,
sheet music for a nostalgic symphony of which our lives comprise
but single trumpet blasts, single notes in the hullabaloo,
or even less—we are but motes of dust in that atmosphere
shaken by the vibrations of time's imperious crescendo.
That it never ends, O Lord. That it goes on,
without pause or cessation, without pity or remorse.
That we have willed it into existence, dreamed it into being.
That it is our divine monster, our factotum, our scourge.
That I can imagine nothing more beautiful
than to propitiate such a god upon the seeds of my own heart.

—Campbell McGrath

tion: there were too many people on the panels. Perhaps, next time, they could come up with a better way to organize them.

In 1991, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the Democratic senator from New York, was looking for a judge. George H. W. Bush was in office, but Moynihan and the Republican senator Alfonse D'Amato had a deal: in a Republican Administration, Moynihan could pick one federal judge for every three that D'Amato chose. Nick Allard, Sotomayor's colleague from the Princeton steam line, had, by that time, worked for years in Democratic politics. One day, Chester Straub, the head of Moynihan's judicial-selection committee, called Allard in to talk about potential nominees. Allard said, "I vividly remember saying, 'Sonia Sotomayor is terrific, and she should be the head of any list.' And Moynihan, in his stammering, sarcastic staccato, looked at me and said, 'Some news flash. Like telling me DiMaggio can hit.' "

Sotomayor was confirmed as a district-court judge with the unanimous consent of the Senate in August, 1992. "The hearing was wonderful," she said later. "Because a Democratic senator had proposed me and a Republican President nominated me, my questions were pro forma." Five years later, in June of 1997, President Clinton submitted her name to the Senate as a nominee to the Second Circuit Court of Appeals.

Things proceeded smoothly until the hearing. "Unfortunately, at 12 noon of the day of my hearing, Rush Limbaugh decided to devote his radio show to my nomination," Sotomayor recalled later. Limbaugh's objections were strategic: Sotomayor was on a "rocket ship" to the Supreme Court, he warned. It was March, 1998, before the Judiciary Committee voted, 16–2, to send Sotomayor's name to the full Senate. The nomination stalled. Finally, in October, amid intense pressure from Hispanic groups—Sotomayor's supporters sent ten thousand letters to senators—Sotomayor got a hearing. She was confirmed, 67–29. After the experience, she sounded unusually cynical. "Although we all wish to believe that appointments are only the product of merit, the harsh reality is that the support of community groups is critical to insuring that meritorious candidates are not overlooked or victimized in the appointment process," she said.

Sotomayor's chambers, at the federal courthouse on Foley Square, were known as a cheerful, unhierarchical place to work. One morning, everyone adjourned to see "Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix." At Halloween, Sotomayor decorated the office with scarecrows and pumpkins; in December, she would bring Christmas decorations and a menorah. During the 2006-07 term, after an exhausting day of interviewing candidates for the next year's clerk slots, Sotomayor invited her current clerks to her apartment, in Greenwich Village. "She was like, 'O.K., guys, the second I'm done with the last interview I'm running home, we're getting burgers!'" Kyle Wong, a former clerk, recalled. "We went over and she had Scotch and all this wine and beer. We sat down at eight and then she busts out the poker, and we play Texas hold 'em until two o'clock in the morning." At the end of the night, Sotomayor made sure that everyone had cab fare, yelling, as the clerks drove off, "I don't have to see you guys before 10 A.M. tomorrow!"

Judges tend to surround themselves with people who, in some way, reflect their values or their passions. "O'Connor liked Arizonans, Rehnquist tennis players; Ginsburg favors musicians, Souter quirky intellectuals," Jeffrey Toobin writes, in "The Nine." Sotomayor's priority is to assemble a cohesive group. She does not hire people who know each other, fearing that it will imbalance the dynamic. Her clerks are typically amiable generalists. More politically engaged clerks can find Sotomayor's ideological reticence frustrating—in Cassidy v. Chertoff (2006), for example, rather than challenging the expanding powers of the national-security state, she ruled that the operators of a ferry-boat company on

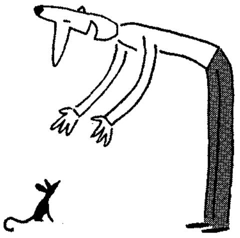
Lake Champlain could search passengers at random in the name of preventing terrorism.

Unlike a lot of judges, Sotomayor reads briefs first. She then passes them to her clerks, with annotations to guide their research. Many clerks noted the extent to which Sotomayor delves into the factual record from the lower court. "She takes each case and works it to death to get the right result," Adam Abensohn, a former clerk, said. Danielle Tarantolo, another former clerk, said that Sotomayor has an unusual ability to isolate the "pressure points" of a case. Even in lighthearted matters, Sotomayor can be a grind. Before she threw the first pitch at a Yankees game, last September, she enlisted a personal-trainer friend to help her practice. When Abensohn and his fiancée asked her to officiate at their wedding, she invited them out to dinner. "She showed up with a legal pad and pen and was essentially interviewing us—how did we meet, and when did we fall in love, and why do we like each other?" Abensohn recalled.

In the courtroom, Sotomayor values preparation. "I liked to parry and to win her over," the criminal-defense attorney Gerald Shargel recalled. "She can be, and is, won over by lawyers who are prepared. But if a lawyer acts like a fool she will go for the jugular." A study of Sotomayor's criminal decisions by the University of Texas law professor Stefanie Lindquist found that, of sixty-seven majority opinions involving criminal matters, eighty-one per cent were pro-government and nineteen per cent were pro-defendant. "People who think she's going to be a really reliable liberal on all issues—I don't know!" one of Sotomayor's former clerks said. "But people simplify. No one is harder on prosecutors. If you fuck up or withhold Brady info"—evidence or information that is favorable to a defendant—"or do something that's unethical or wrong, she will destroy you." In 1993, as a district-court judge, Sotomayor presided over the sentencing of a police officer who had sold heroin. The probation report recommended four to five years in prison. Sotomayor, citing the officer's "abuse of trust," gave him seven. Still, she is a stickler for procedural safeguards. In November, she joined Justice Ginsburg in signing a statement issued by Justice John Paul Stevens, condemning "the perversity of executing inmates"—the inmate in question was one of the Beltway snipers—"before their appeals process has been fully concluded."

Sotomayor is perceived as being more liberal in cases involving immigration. Although an analysis compiled by Senator Schumer's office suggested that her rate of deciding with the government—eighty-three per cent—was consistent with that of the rest of the Second Circuit, she drew notice, in her first Supreme Court opinion, by using the terms "undocumented immigrant" and "undocumented worker" instead of "illegal immigrant." Bruno Bembi, a lawyer who has argued several immigration cases before Sotomayor, said, "If there was a way that you could interpret the matter so that you could give the alien the benefit of the doubt, or go along with some of the Ninth Circuit"—the liberal California court—"cases, she would give that to you if it was reasonable." Judge Rosemary Pooler said, "She was very thoughtful and very willing to try to find ways, within the tight system that has evolved, for immigrants to achieve asylum."

Sotomayor's concurring opinion in Lin v. United States Department of Justice (2007) may epitomize her jurisprudence. In the case, three Chinese aliens—the unmarried partners of women who had been subject to China's forced-abortion policies—petitioned for automatic asylum on the basis of persecution. The majority rejected their claim, ruling that automatic asylum did not extend to spouses or to unmarried partners. Sotomayor's opinion united two sometimes conflicting strands of her jurisprudence—an aversion to going beyond the issues at hand and a concern about the effects of laws on people—citing dry procedural principles to reach a compassionate conclusion. Since the petitioners were unmarried, the Court had erred, she wrote, in considering the question of whether partners and spouses should be permitted asylum ("Today's decision marks an extraordinary and unwarranted departure from our longstanding principles of deference and judicial restraint"). But, since it had, it should have realized that spouses can experience persecution by association ("The termination of a wanted pregnancy under a coercive population control program can only be devastating to any couple, akin, no doubt, to the killing of a child").



Sotomayor has said that she considers herself "merely an average writer." Clarity, not refinement, is her aim. "I once wanted to use the word 'pellucid,' and we had a tussle about that," Kyle Wong recalled. As an intellectual-property lawyer, Sotomayor worked with several other lawyers to write an anti-counterfeiting law. (This experience may account for some of Sotomayor's sensitivity to legislative intent.) Heather McDonald, who also worked on the bill, recalled that various key provisions ended up being neutered by political horse-trading in Albany. "Sonia, more than the rest of us, was frustrated with the law we ended up with, because, frankly, it wasn't that easy to prosecute a case under," McDonald recalled.

During the hearings, Ta-Nehisi Coates wrote on his blog, for *The Atlantic*, that Sotomayor's exacting diction reminded him "of one of those teachers in middle school who worked hard to scrub away the hood accent." At one point during her hearings, Senator Benjamin Cardin asked Sotomayor about the importance of diversity. "With respect to the issue of the question of what role diversity serves in the society, it hearkens back almost directly to your previous question," she replied. "I've been overusing that word, 'hearken'—sorry!" One could almost see her mentally wielding a big red pen.

Words, for Sotomayor, are means, not ends. She rarely attempts to transcend the facts at hand, or to speak to broader constituencies. "She's not swinging for the rafters," a former clerk said. "She writes for people who want to know what the law is." Sotomayor does not have a particularly novel, or consistent, judicial philosophy. An admirer of Justice Souter's writing, for its humility and restraint, "she believes that this is a serious business we're doing, and a judge shouldn't be taking the time to write a novel," Wong said. Legal opinions, in Sotomayor's view, are like instruction manuals—everyone should be able to follow them. In

Dear U.S.P.S. —
Julie Michaels's mail is no longer in care of Apt. 8-B. She has moved out to Queens. Queens!! Can you believe it??? Three years I devoted to that woman! Oh, well. C'est la vie. I'll find someone else, I suppose. Eventually. Yeah, right!
—W. Linhart, Apt. 8-B

Farrell v. Burke, Sotomayor, resisting the temptation to wax about the First Amendment, chose simply to include the following exchange from the testimony of a police officer who had charged a convicted sex offender for violating the terms of his probation by possessing obscene materials:

> MR. NATHANSON: Are you saying, for example, that that condition of parole would prohibit Mr. Farrell from possessing, say, Playboy magazine?
>
> P.O. BURKE: Yes.
>
> MR. NATHANSON: Are you saying that that condition of parole would prohibit Mr. Farrell from possessing a photograph of Michelangelo['s] David?
>
> P.O. BURKE: What is that?
>
> MR. NATHANSON: Are you familiar with that sculpture?
>
> P.O. BURKE: No.
>
> MR. NATHANSON: If I tell you it's a large sculpture of a nude youth with his genitals exposed and visible, does that help to refresh your memory of what that is?
>
> P.O. BURKE: If he possessed that, yes, he would be locked up for that.

Still, Sotomayor ruled that Farrell had violated his parole. "Although a series of strongly worded opinions by this Court and others suggest that the term 'pornography' is unconstitutionally vague, we hold that *Scum* falls within any reasonable definition of pornography," she wrote.

In Ford v. McGinnis (2003), she reversed the decision of a district court that a Muslim prisoner's free-exercise rights had not been violated when he was refused a meal for the feast of Eid ul Fitr. Her opinion was bereft of stirring language about oppression and liberty. Instead, she presented the outcome almost grudgingly, as a technocratic inevitability, a liberal outcome compelled by the conservative method of dutifully applying a law—in this case, Congress's substantial-burden test—that she didn't particularly like. "Applying the substantial burden test requires courts to distinguish important from unimportant religious beliefs, a task for which we have already explained courts are particularly ill-suited," Sotomayor wrote, before applying the test anyhow. Dissenting in Hayden v. Pataki (2006), she also used conservative means to come to a liberal conclusion, determining, by a literal reading of the Voting Rights Act, that felons should be allowed to contest their disenfranchisement.

"Sonia's tendency has been to suffer evils until she deems them no longer sufferable," Peter Kougasian, who attended Princeton with Sotomayor and worked with her in the D.A.'s office, said, paraphrasing the Declaration of Independence. As Jeffrey Rosen noted in another article in *The New Republic*, a sense of outrage or of passion has emerged most frequently in her dissents, which have tended to be more liberal than her majority opinions. In N.G. and S.G. v. Connecticut (2004), she objected to the strip search of girls at juvenile-detention centers, writing, with unusual vim and detail, "The officials inspected the girls' naked bodies front and back, and had them lift their breasts and spread out folds of fat." In Gant v. Wallingford Board of Education (1999), she movingly defended a first grader, the only black boy in his class, who had been demoted to kindergarten after nine days: "I consider the treatment this lone black child encountered during his brief time in Cook Hill's first grade to have been not merely 'arguably unusual' or 'indisputably discretionary,' but unprecedented and contrary to the school's established policies." These dissents are juicy, but they are not the marrow of Sotomayor's jurisprudence. A lawyer who has litigated civil-liberties cases before her told me, "My disappointment with Sotomayor is that she's not an outlier."

On the morning of July 13th, Sotomayor sat at a long wooden table, listening to the opening statements of the nineteen members of the Senate Judiciary Committee. Under the table was an improvised footrest, rigged with duct tape, for her swollen ankle. She was wearing a cobalt-blue suit. (Two days later, she chose a black pin-striped number that her girlfriends had brought back for her, along with twenty-five other possibilities, from a shopping expedition to the Woodbury Common outlets.) Sotomayor had undergone weeks of "murder boards," during which White House staff quizzed her on the latest legal developments (she had business law down but was less familiar with the administrative canon) and coached her on how to handle the senators (never interrupt a senator's question—he is speaking for television). She was staying at a suite at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, downtown. Some nights, she went home and, surrounded by binders, ate cereal for dinner.

The hearing went twenty-two minutes before the first mention of "wise Latina." Senator Jeff Sessions, the Republican from Alabama, intoned, "I think it is noteworthy that, when asked about Judge Sotomayor's now famous statement that a 'wise Latina' would come to a better conclusion than others, President Obama, White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs, and Supreme Court Justice Ginsburg declined to defend the substance of those remarks." Sotomayor regarded the senators with withering impassivity. When Senator Lindsey Graham, of South Carolina, who emerged as Sotomayor's most eloquent and provocative antagonist, delivered one of the hearing's most memorable lines—"If I had said anything remotely like that, my career would have been over"—she looked as though she had smelled something bad.

The senators presented themselves as abstract platonic guardians of the American polity, without acknowledging—or perhaps being aware of—the fact that, if they had never said anything sticky about race or about gender, they had also very infrequently been asked to say anything about race and gender at all. ("The Daily Show" lampooned the charge that Sotomayor was a racist with a mock-exposé of the Bronxdale Houses, the "exclusive lily-brown gated community" where Sotomayor grew up.) Sotomayor made her infamous comment—"I would hope that a wise Latina woman with the richness of her experiences would more often than not reach a better conclusion than a white male who hasn't lived that life"—as part of a speech entitled "A Latina Judge's Voice." She delivered the speech, and others like it, many times to Latino lawyers and law students. On such occasions, Sotomayor had been drafted as a cheerleader. The speeches were inspirational and banal—she would always be, she said, "a kid with curls running through the streets of Puerto Rico chasing raindrops on summer afternoons and eating piraguas with the syrup running down my face"; her Latina identity was an "ember that blazes forever."

In contrast to her flat judicial writings, Sotomayor's public speeches are full of hyperbole. In a sentimental mood, she has a tendency to lapse into a wide-eyed, superlative mode: having her portrait hung at a health clinic was "the most important honor of my life"; her meeting Morgenthau was its "most special moment"; the late Judge Fred Parker had an "intellect as deep as the Grand Canyon, and . . . a heart as big as a lion." Ultimately, the Latina comment didn't make sense—a Latina woman would reach a better conclusion about what?

Sotomayor's opponents made much of the contrast between Sandra Day O'Connor, the supposedly restrained neutral incrementalist, and the hysterical empathizing activist Sotomayor, who, the Fox News analyst Linda Chavez commented on the fourth day, "has drunk deep from the well of identity politics." In 1991, O'Connor had made her own much cited wise-woman quote. However, it was not actually O'Connor's; she had been recapitulating a statement by a Minnesota State Supreme Court justice, Mary Jeanne Coyne, that "a wise old man and a wise old woman reach the same conclusion" when deciding cases. In fact, O'Connor has explicitly contradicted the idea that men and women—wise or not—see things identically. In her 2003 book "The Majesty of the Law," she discussed a study in which researchers found that female judges were more likely than male judges to send women to jail. "I believe this was true when I was a trial judge, and I think I know why," O'Connor wrote. "Male judges are more likely to believe a sob story from a female defendant. Female judges know better."

"Empathy" became the code word for reaching decisions on issues of race and gender that Republican senators didn't like. And "code words," decried by Senators Ted Kaufman and Sheldon Whitehouse, became the code word for making comments that Democratic senators thought were racist and sexist. No one talked about how empathy can relate to class and how, when it does, we think it's a good thing. It would be hard to imagine anyone raising objections to Sotomayor's drawing on her knowledge of life in New York's financially precarious classes to conclude, as she did in Krimstock v. Kelly (2002), an impoundment case, that "a car or truck is often central to a person's livelihood or daily activities," or, in Lin, that "we simply have no foundation on which to conclude that all couples have the financial resources to escape at the same time."

Sotomayor has an awareness of the practical, almost bodily concerns that can affect the law. "Prepare a small volume of just the critical documents so the judge can refer to them easily or take them home without losing an arm," she once counselled a group of young attorneys. To another, she said, "Filing and serving a restraining order on the eve of a holiday may be procedurally permissible, but it is both inhumane and unfair." In a speech, she recalled Titi Gloria, a seamstress, babysitting her in a dark, airless sweatshop. "Titi would vigilantly chase me away from the door all day long," Sotomayor wrote, adding that it dawned on her only later that they were hiding from the police. "Forget first Latina," Ted Shaw, her former classmate, said. "She's the only Justice I am aware of who's ever grown up in a housing project."

It was not, despite the contortions of the Republicans, actually a new, a partisan, or a particularly radical idea that different judges judge differently. Justice Scalia, the self-proclaimed originalist, acknowledged in "Making Your Case: The Art of Persuading Judges," a how-to guide for attorneys which he co-wrote last year, that "all sorts of extraneous factors—emotions, biases, preferences—can intervene" in the courtroom. (Scalia recommends doing "a little computer research" to detect a judge's love for fly-fishing or fine wines.) Sotomayor's "wise Latina" comment was unsettling, and a little depressing, not because it went too far but because it was too limited, reducing the spectrum of decision-making to some sort of biological determinism. "The aspiration to impartiality is just that—it's an aspiration because it denies the fact that we are by our experiences making different choices than others," she wrote. The robotic dispensation of justice is a fiction, but Sotomayor had neglected the possibility of making different choices by our intellects or by our ethical convictions.

In practice, Sotomayor has often favored arid appeals to logic or precedent. So people's arms hurt when they have to carry heavy briefcases—who cares? Sotomayor essentially wrote in Singh v. City of New York (2008), in which she denied the claim of a group of fire-alarm inspectors that they should be paid for having to lug documents on their commutes. "One of the things that stuck with me was that she never used the vilification approach," Peter A. Furst, who represented the Tarzan Burglar, said. "She didn't do what many prosecutors will do, which is to take the advantage to make the person look ugly." In a case in which the federal government was attempting to seize the East Village clubhouse of the Hells Angels Motorcycle Club, Sotomayor, as a district-court judge, chided prosecutors for playing upon loaded stereotypes of the biker gang. "The Government ostensibly believes that the confessed criminality of the individual members of the HAMC group, and perhaps even their unorthodox lifestyle, should have enveloped the Building in a cloud of criminality in the jurors' mind," she wrote. "Such, however, was not the case." Tom Goldstein, of Scotusblog, has found that, in ninety-seven race-related opinions, Sotomayor dissented from her colleagues four times, and only once (in the Gant case) saw racial discrimination where they did not.

Plowing through life with workmanlike cheer—"She has no depressive affect," Steve Skulnik recalled—Sotomayor has often seemed immune to the fears and insecurities that have plagued so many people who find themselves, as adults, in very different stations from those in which they grew up. "To her great credit, she has very little of *el complejo colonial*, the doubts that afflict so many of us," Judge José Cabranes, Jr., of the Second Circuit, told me. But Sotomayor, despite her outward equanimity, has been a quiet seeker, contemplating, in her undramatic way, what she has called "the pathology of successful Latinos." As much as she has celebrated her Puerto Rican identity, she has also sought to escape what she has called "the gripping and narrowing tentacles of life experiences." When Senator John Cornyn, of Texas, asked her whether she believed that physiological differences influenced judging, Sotomayor replied, "Ignoring things and saying, you know, it doesn't happen isn't an answer to a situation."

In a profession that values the illusion of infallibility, Sotomayor has been unusually willing to acknowledge murky areas. In her writings and speeches, she has returned to key texts: Stephen Carter's "Reflections of an Affirmative Action Baby"; Carol Gilligan's "In a Different Voice"; Judith Resnik's "On the Bias: Feminist Reconsiderations of the Aspirations for Our Judges"; studies in the journal *Judicature* on how women affect judging. She acknowledges a tension between the ideal (experiences do not influence us at all) and the real (experiences affect us), and suggests that, while we should continually work toward the ideal, we ignore or neglect the real at our peril. From Resnik, Gilligan, and the *Judicature* essays, she takes the idea that women are different from men, combining it with Stephen Carter's thesis that there is no single "people of color" voice (or "female voice," for that matter), to conclude that "excluded people" are different, but they are not all different in the same way. Another of Sotomayor's influences is Judge Jerome Frank's 1930 classic "Law and the Modern Mind." If, according to Frank, the world can be divided into two classifications—"rule skeptics," who question formal legal rules, and "fact skeptics," who question the particularities of a case—then Sotomayor might be considered a self-skeptic: someone who, like a golfer videotaping her swing, is constantly checking herself for tics and hitches.

The third day of the hearings, eleven men in blue uniforms filed into the Judiciary Committee chamber. They were New Haven firefighters, amassed in support of one of their own—Frank Ricci, a white man who had been denied a promotion when he passed a test that many of his black and Hispanic colleagues failed. Outside, a woman with flip-flops and a beach ball brandished a sign: "I can't swim, but thanks to Sonia Sotomayor I'm a lifeguard."

Ricci, who is dyslexic, had passed the test to become a lieutenant after studying eight hours a day and spending more than a thousand dollars on study aids. The city, fearing a lawsuit under the principle of disparate impact—the Supreme Court had established that an employer could be held liable for employment practices that were in effect discriminatory even if they were unintentional—declined to certify the test results. Ricci and nineteen colleagues sued New Haven for discriminating against them on the basis of their race. In district court, Judge Janet Bond Arterton dismissed Ricci's lawsuit, writing, "It is necessarily undisputed that, had minority firefighters challenged the results of the examinations, the City would have been in a position of defending tests that, under applicable Guidelines, presumptively had a disparate racial impact."

In December, 2007, a three-person panel consisting of Sotomayor, Judge Rosemary Pooler, and Judge Robert Sack heard the case on appeal. The following February, they issued an unsigned, unpublished affirmation of Arterton's opinion. Judge Cabranes, reading about the case in the New Haven *Register*, was shocked at what he perceived as the panel's attempt to bury a politically inflammatory case.

Cabranes had been a mentor to Sotomayor for three decades, but they had grown apart in recent years. Cabranes had adopted more conservative views, particularly on matters of civil rights, and it had become increasingly likely that Sotomayor would be appointed the first Hispanic on the Supreme Court—a prize that had eluded Cabranes, a pioneer of the Puerto Rican bench. ("How did Satchel Paige feel about Jackie Robinson?" Drew Ryce, a friend of Sotomayor's, told the *Times*.) Cabranes, in an embarrassing rebuke to Sotomayor and her fellow-panelists, requested that the Second Circuit rehear the Ricci case en banc. The panel then issued a per-curiam opinion—an anonymous decision on behalf of the panel as a whole—asserting, in eight sentences, that while "we are not unsympathetic to the plaintiffs' expression of frustration . . . it simply does not follow that [Ricci] had a viable Title VII claim." Three days later, Cabranes's motion was defeated in a politically fractured 7-6 vote. (As the *National Journal* pointed out, all but one of the seven were Clinton appointees, while five of the six were appointed by Bush.) Cabranes issued a strongly worded dissent, urging the Supreme Court to review the case.

Sotomayor and her colleagues assert that they issued the summary order because of the thoroughness of the district-court opinion, or, alternatively, because of overwork. Their excuses are less than wholly convincing. Sotomayor is politically savvy—during the hearings, she did not hesitate to distance herself from either her former boss George Pavia, who had made the mistake of telling a reporter that Sotomayor would definitely be pro-choice ("He's a corporate litigator, and my experience with corporate litigators is that they only look at the law when it affects the case before them," she told the senators), or Obama ("I wouldn't approach the issue of judging in the way the President does"). When Lindsey Graham attempted to trap her into repeating the "wise Latina" comment for the evening news, she simply sat it out as he shuffled through his papers, making a show of not being able to find the quote.

In three days of questioning over Ricci, Sotomayor managed to make an incendiary case sound like a civil-service dispute whose disposition was commanded not by notions of an ideal civil society but strictly by the facts at hand—which, to a judge unwilling to set aside precedent in the name of fundamental fairness, it was. On June 29th, the Supreme Court effectively changed the law, with a 5-4 decision overturning the Second Circuit opinion that Sotomayor had joined.

In all the commotion over Ricci and "wise Latina," the senators had missed what was perhaps a more inflammatory statement. In 2000, at the graduation ceremony of the Bronx Leadership Academy, Sotomayor had said, "It is so exciting to be at the door of a major change in one's life. That's why brides and bridegrooms smile so much at weddings and why so many tears of joy are shed when a wanted child arrives"—her unprompted use of the phrase "wanted child" acknowledging the possibility that an expectant parent could feel otherwise.

By August 6th, the day that the Senate was scheduled to vote on Sotomayor's confirmation, a meltdown had not occurred. It was clear, as it had been all along, that Sotomayor would be the hundred and eleventh Justice of the United States Supreme Court. Sotomayor, back in her chambers at the Moynihan Courthouse, in New York, sent an e-mail to the building's entire staff:

> The best estimate of Senate vote count is now some time after 4:00pm Thursday, August 6. I want to share that moment with my entire Court family and the Chief Judge is graciously making Room 850 here at 500 Pearl available to watch the count. The entire building will be invited to watch, but only if they want to come. . . . I am both excited and nervous. I thank you all for the support you have extended to me throughout our time as friends. Sonia.

Many members of the Supreme Court have been famous, but Sotomayor has become the first celebrity Justice. This fall, the Upright Citizens Brigade Web site hosted a spoof video entitled "Sonia Sotomayor Speed Date": "After Dad died, my mother, Celina Sotomayor, moved my brother and I into a Buick Sentry parked under the Whitestone Bridge," a man dressed in drag, with a "HELLO, MY NAME IS SONIA" name tag, intones, sounding like Julia Child doing Don Corleone. (Then, flirty and distracted, "Oh—you're a chef? Oh, yum!") Eva Longoria Parker, from "Desperate Housewives," bragged to the Hollywood *Reporter* that she had danced with Sotomayor at a Latin-music festival at the White House: "I found her and said, 'I've been waiting to meet you.' And she said, 'I'm really proud of you, Eva. Can I have a photo?' " It's hard to imagine that Cindy Adams's *Post* column would feature any other Justice shopping at a West Side lingerie store for a "fancy shmancy" bra.

In September, Alex Rodriguez and Bettie Baca, his wife, were in New York for a few days, sleeping on Sotomayor's pullout couch. Sotomayor mentioned that she had been invited to dinner at Marc Anthony and Jennifer Lopez's house, and a personal shopper was coming over to help her find something to wear. Later, Rodriguez ran into Manny Mirabal, a former president of the National Puerto Rican Coalition. "I just got off the phone with Marc Anthony," Mirabal said. "I was trying to talk to J-Lo, but she had just gone out with her shopper to pick out an outfit to impress Sonia Sotomayor."

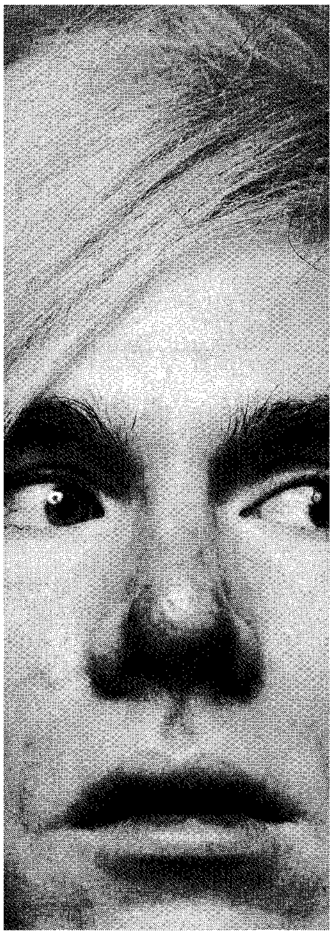
The *National Law Journal*, using the Court's second two-week cycle of arguments as a representative period, calculated, in November, that Sotomayor, who asked a hundred and forty-six questions in the course of thirteen arguments (average: 11.2 questions per argument), had asked more questions than Chief Justice John Roberts, Jr., and Justice Alito at comparable periods in their first terms. If the first year of the job, as Justice Souter—a nonentity in his early days on the Court—once asserted, is like "walking into a tidal wave," Sotomayor is bodysurfing. In Graham v. Florida, which the Court heard in November, her questions to the state's lawyer, Scott Makar, nearly amounted to a soliloquy on the cruel and unusual nature of subjecting juvenile criminals to life without parole.

Perhaps in an effort to absorb quickly the mores of the Court, Sotomayor has hired experienced clerks, including one who spent the past year clerking for Justice Stevens and another who clerked for Justice Ginsburg. Near her desk is a framed cartoon by the Mexican-American illustrator Lalo Alcaraz. Against a lavender background, a girl with a pink bow in her dark hair sits at a desk, banging a gavel. A nameplate in front of her reads "Judge Lopez." To her right is a makeshift witness box, inhabited by a Teddy bear. The jury box is full of stuffed animals. Taped to the wall behind her is a photograph of Justice Sonia Sotomayor.

TROUBLE IN PARADISE
I feel a draft.
There's God. Ask him if we can change clouds.

Assessing, or canonizing, Justices before they have had a chance to judge is a chancy proposition. The consensus when Scalia joined the Court was that he'd be a consensus builder. People who know Sotomayor and her work offered various historical analogues as auguries of her future. "I see her in some ways as like John Paul Stevens, in that he also has that thoughtfulness and that unwillingness to be swayed on either side by histrionics," Stephen Carter, the Yale law professor, said. Kenji Yoshino, a law professor at N.Y.U., cited Powell and O'Connor ("She'll decide issues on narrow grounds, she's not pre-committed to a constitutional mode of interpretation"), while Judge Miriam Goldman Cedarbaum, Sotomayor's former colleague on the Southern District court, likened her to John Marshall ("He liked to chat with people in the village square and pass the time with all sorts of people. He was a democrat, with a small 'd'"). To Judge Guido Calabresi, another former colleague, Sotomayor defied prophesy altogether. "Her whole experience as part of three discriminated-against groups, and ones which are not always coherent with each other—I'm talking about ethnicity, gender, and disability—plus her legal experience, in really being a district judge, really being a Court of Appeals judge, makes her different from really any Justice that I can think of," he said.

In his book "The Supreme Court," the late Chief Justice William Rehnquist described the Supreme Court as "a collegial body where long-term success depended on winning over others of quite different backgrounds." On the Second Circuit, Sotomayor had a rule that endeared her to her colleagues: if a request from another judge comes in, she instructed her clerks, drop whatever you're doing. On the Supreme Court, Sotomayor has already begun to win allies. Late in the summer, President Obama held a reception in her honor at the White House. The eighty-nine-year-old Justice John Paul Stevens, who has long shunned White House ceremonies for new Justices, showed up, telling people that he felt as though he'd known Sotomayor his entire life. ♦



A CRITIC AT LARGE

TOP OF THE POPS

Did Andy Warhol change everything?

BY LOUIS MENAND

Andy Warhol's parents came from a village in the Carpathian Mountains, in what is now Slovakia. They immigrated to Pittsburgh, where, in 1928, Andy was born, the youngest of four children. Warhol's father was a construction worker, and he died, of peritonitis, when Andy was thirteen; but he had saved enough money for his son to go to college, since it was obvious that Andy was an unusual and talented child.

Warhol entered the Carnegie Institute of Technology (now Carnegie Mellon) when he was seventeen, and majored in pictorial design. He struggled at first. He was younger than most of the other students, many of whom were veterans attending on the G.I. Bill; he was also possibly dyslexic. But he eventually became an admired, and sometimes controversial, figure at the school. He had an ethereality that was oddly charismatic—"like an angel in the sky" is the way one of his classmates remembered him. After he graduated, in June, 1949, he moved to New York City, where he found work as an illustrator.

By 1960, Warhol had become one of the most successful commercial artists in New York. He drew, with a distinctive and recognizable line, magazine illustrations, advertisements, book jackets, and album covers, and he owned a four-story town house on the Upper East Side. But he had fine-art aspirations. His fey, slightly spacy air of ingenuousness was not a liability at advertising agencies and fashion magazines, but it was a problem in literary and artistic circles, and especially among gays. Warhol was regarded as a slightly embarrassing groupie. Truman Capote, with whom he was briefly infatuated, called him "a hopeless born loser." "A terrible little man," the director of the Tibor de Nagy gallery, where the poet Frank O'Hara hung out, is said to have described him. "A very boring person, but you have to be nice to him because he might buy a painting." In 1958, after Jasper Johns's exhibition of the "Flag" paintings, at the Castelli Gallery, rocked the New York art world, Warhol became obsessed with Johns, and with Johns's collaborator and (many have assumed) lover Robert Rauschenberg. They, too, were cool; Warhol later decided that he was too "swish" for them.

Warhol's big break finally came in 1962, with a one-man exhibition at the Ferus Gallery, in Los Angeles. This was "32 Campbell's Soup Cans"—thirty-two paintings of soup cans, each a different flavor. A New York show soon followed, and by 1964, the year he exhibited the "Brillo Soap Pads Box" sculptures, he was being written up in *Time*. He was no longer on the outside of the windowpane.

Warhol had already begun making movies. He also produced the Velvet Underground, and he "wrote" (using a tape recorder) a novel, entitled "a." In the mid-nineteen-sixties, his studio on East Forty-seventh Street, known as the Factory, was a center of avant-garde activity. Virtually everyone fashionable in art, ideas, and entertainment passed through it, from Mick Jagger and Bob Dylan to Susan Sontag and John Ashbery.

Amphetamines were the drug of choice in the Factory; transvestism was the fashion. Warhol himself wore jeans and took only prescription diet pills, but he developed a carapace of inscrutability. He could be generous and he could be withholding, and you never knew which he would choose—the classic technique of the passive-aggressive. Within the Factory, he was known as Drella, after the two sides of his personality, Dracula and Cinderella. As an artist, he was astonishingly productive and a great risk-taker. At a time when it seemed that everyone was going too far, he went farther. Then, in 1968, a paranoid schizophrenic named

Andy Warhol, New York City, August 14, 1969. Photograph by Richard Avedon.

Valerie Solanas shot Warhol and nearly killed him, and although he returned to painting and to a jet-set social life, his work was never again on the leading edge of the contemporary arts. He died in New York Hospital, after a routine operation, in 1987. He was fifty-eight.

There are some terrific books about Warhol and the nineteen-sixties, including Warhol's own wonderfully funny and clever memoir, written with Pat Hackett, "POPism" (1980). The recently published "Pop: The Genius of Andy Warhol," by Tony Scherman and David Dalton, is, basically, the familiar story. It is not as richly informative as Steven Watson's monumental group biography of Warhol and his circle, "Factory Made" (2003), or as critically imaginative as Wayne Koestenbaum's "Andy Warhol" (2001), but it is knowledgeable and smart, it presents much fresh material (Dalton and his sister, Sarah, were close to Warhol in the nineteen-sixties), and it's a lot of fun to read.

Anyone who writes about Warhol faces two meta-problems, one having to do with the man and the other with the work. It should be a rule when writing about Warhol never to take anything he said completely seriously, and it would be a rule, probably, if there were not always one or two irresistible bits that suit the writer's purpose. From the beginning, Warhol postured and prevaricated when he was interviewed, sometimes obviously but sometimes not so obviously. And the sources of several of his most apparently serious remarks—a 1963 interview in *ARTnews*, by Gene Swenson, and a 1966 interview in the *East Village Other*, by Gretchen Berg—were almost certainly doctored by the interviewers. Berg referred to her piece as a "word collage," and in the *ARTnews* interview Warhol is made to refer to an article in *The Hudson Review*, a publication that was about as far outside his orbit as the *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association*.

The essence of Warhol's genius was to eliminate the one aspect of a thing without which that thing would, to conventional ways of thinking, cease to be itself, and then to see what happened. He made movies of objects that never moved and used actors who could not act, and he made art that did not look like art. He wrote a novel without doing any writing. He had his mother sign his work, and he sent an actor, Allen Midgette, to impersonate him on a lecture tour (and, for a while, Midgette got away with it). He had other people make his paintings.

And he demonstrated, almost every time he did this, that it didn't make any difference. His Brillo boxes were received as art, and his eight-hour movie of the Empire State Building was received as a movie. The people who saw someone pretending to be Andy Warhol believed that they had seen Andy Warhol. ("Andy helped me see into fame and through it," Midgette later said.) The works that his mother signed and that other people made were sold as Warhols. And what he made up in interviews was quoted by critics to explain his intentions. Warhol wasn't hiding anything, and he wasn't out to trick anyone. He was only changing one rule, the most basic rule, of the game. He found that people just kept on playing.

"What does your mother have to do to get a drink around here?"

Warhol loved gossip. He spent hours on the phone every day keeping up with the scene, and he naturally populated his world with men and women who shared his taste. Quite a few of these later produced memoirs: Gerard Malanga, who was Warhol's principal assistant from 1963 to 1970; John Giorno, the star of Warhol's first film, "Sleep" (1963); Mary Woronov, who performed with the Velvet Underground and acted in some of the films; and the so-called superstars Janet Susan Mary Hoffman (a.k.a. Viva) and Isabelle Collin Dufresne (a.k.a. Ultra Violet). Other Factory figures—notably Billy Linich (a.k.a. Billy Name), who was the de-facto chief of operations at the Factory; Brigid Berlin, a Fifth Avenue heiress and connoisseur of amphetamines; and the underground movie actor Taylor Mead—were interviewed repeatedly over the years.

So were various art-world figures associated with Warhol in the early stages of his career, particularly Emile de Antonio, a documentary filmmaker, and Henry Geldzahler, a curator of American painting and sculpture at the Met, both of whom introduced Warhol to artists, dealers, and collectors. Ivan Karp, who worked at the Castelli Gallery, and who discovered many of the Pop artists, gave a number of interviews. So did Irving Blum, who ran the Ferus Gallery, and who bought "32 Campbell's Soup Cans," and Robert Scull, a taxi tycoon and art collector, whose wife at the time was the subject of one of Warhol's earliest and most famous portrait paintings, "Ethel Scull 36 Times," in 1963. (Some of these interviews are collected in "The Autobiography and Sex Life of Andy Warhol," by John Wilcock, which is being republished early this year.)

For the biographer, these sources have "Handle with Care" stamped all over them. On the art-world side, of course, the subjects have a professional or financial stake in Warhol's reputation. But, even on the personal side, people tend to become invested in their own version of events. Life at the Factory involved a lot of jockeying for Warhol's attention, a state of affairs that he encouraged, and that continued in spirit long after the life was over. These people were caught up in a system whose sole reward—Warhol paid his assistants little and his actors nothing in the Factory years—was proximity to the artist. In memorializing their experiences, they probably held disinterestedness to be about the least of their concerns. The culture around Warhol was a culture of high artifice—its icon was the drag queen—and the gossip, the posing, and the pretense were part of that. They do not make reliable history.

"He says it's not an invasion—it's a cruise."

Even on matters taken to be central to an understanding of the man, testimony can be contradictory. Scherman and Dalton, for example, mention Warhol's "well-known discomfort with sex," and many others have claimed that Warhol disliked physical contact and was essentially a voyeur. That he was a voyeur there is little doubt. Warhol liked to hear people talk about sex, and he liked to watch. He was also self-conscious about his looks. He started going bald in his twenties, and he had a terrible complexion. "If someone asked me, 'What's your problem?' " he says, in "The Philosophy of Andy Warhol" (1975), "I'd have to say 'Skin.' " (At one point, he had his nose sanded, which altered his appearance without improving it. His taste in wigs is a matter of opinion.)

But, although Warhol probably did not have his first sexual experience until he was twenty-five, he had many boyfriends afterward, and one of his biographers, Victor Bockris, talked to a sexually well-travelled figure in the art world who had liaisons with Warhol in the early nineteen-sixties, and who reported that Warhol was (in Bockris's words) "extremely good in bed." Giorno, who was good-looking and promiscuous, and who found Warhol a little pathetic, described him as passionate and persistent. Which puts the voyeurism in a somewhat different light. The point wasn't to avoid sex but to suspend the presumption that sexual intimacy requires privacy—a presumption that Warhol played with in many of his movies.

The soup cans pose an analogous difficulty. Some people who knew Warhol claim that he loved Campbell's soup because his mother had served it to him every day for lunch, and other people claim that he hated it, possibly for the same reason. Presumably, no one thought to ask Monet whether he loved haystacks, but the question seems important in Warhol's case because it goes to the other meta-problem in writing about him, which has to do with the significance of the iconography. Soup cans, Coca-Cola bottles, grocery cartons, movie stars, newspaper photos—did he paint this stuff because he thought it was great or because he thought it was junk? Is his work a commentary on the shallowness, repetitiveness, and commercialism of consumer culture, or is it a celebration of supermarkets and Hollywood, a romp with the vulgar—a commentary on the highbrow Puritanism of the fine-art tradition?

This is a subject on which Warhol was exceedingly coy: he usually said that he painted these things because they were easy to paint. And disagreement about which answer is the right answer began when Pop art began, and persists to this day. Scherman and Dalton think that Warhol "wholeheartedly shared the twentieth-century American working class's ardor for the products of consumer culture." But the critic Gary Indiana, in his new book, "Andy Warhol and the Can That Sold the World," says, "I read into Warhol's ongoing enterprise a satirical contempt for the banality" of postwar American life. You can find many iterations of both views in the critical literature.

One reason this problem arises in the case of soup cans, Brillo boxes, and Coke bottles, and not in the case of haystacks, apples, and American flags, is the apparent literalism of the Pop image. Monet and Cézanne and Johns were clearly doing something to the objects they represented—specifically, something painterly. "Take an object. Do something to it. Do something else to it. Ditto" was Johns's formula in the nineteen-fifties. Not doing something, specifically something painterly, seems very much the point of Warhol's early work. This was his version of how he got there (from "POPism"):

> At five o'clock one particular afternoon [probably in the summer of 1960] the doorbell rang and De [Emile de Antonio] came in and sat down. I poured Scotch for us, and then

> I went over to where two paintings I'd done, each about six feet high and three feet wide, were propped, facing the wall. I turned them around and placed them side by side against the wall and then I backed away to take a look at them myself. One of them was a Coke bottle with Abstract Expressionist hash marks halfway up the side. The second one was just a stark, outlined Coke bottle in black and white. I didn't say a thing to De. I didn't have to—he knew what I wanted to know.
>
> "Well, look, Andy," he said after staring at them for a couple of minutes. "One of these is a piece of shit, simply a little bit of everything. The other is remarkable—it's our society, it's who we are, it's absolutely beautiful and naked, and you ought to destroy the first one and show the other."
>
> That afternoon was an important one for me.

One might have reason to doubt that the conversation took place quite as described, but the passage is among those which are considered too good not to quote, because it supports the "Pop changed everything" theory of Warhol's art.

The most distinguished proponent of that theory is Arthur Danto. In his latest book, "Andy Warhol," Danto calls the moment when Warhol became a Pop artist "the most mysterious transformation in the history of artistic creativity," and he says that it turned Warhol into "*the* artist of the second half of the twentieth century." Danto embraces the Everyman view of Pop art: he thinks that Warhol "knew, and was moved by, the same things his audience knew and was moved by" (drag queens?), and that "Andy's art is, in a way, a celebration as art of what every American knows." But that's not why he thinks that Warhol is so important.

Danto is a professor of philosophy at Columbia; his wife, Barbara Westman, is a painter. In April, 1964, he went to see Warhol's show at the Stable gallery, on the Upper East Side. It was an event. The Stable was created in 1953, during the postwar boom in galleries specializing in contemporary American art—part of what many people at the time talked about as the relocation of the capital of the art world from Paris to New York. Its owner, Eleanor Ward, had given Warhol his first major New York one-man exhibition, in November, 1962, in which he showed the Marilyn silk screens, along with other work. The following fall, Warhol had a second show at the Ferus, in Los Angeles, consisting entirely of silk screens of identical images of Elvis Presley. By the time of the 1964 Stable show, he was famous, partly because Pop had by then become a recognized school of painting but also because, a week before the show opened, he had been in a controversy involving the World's Fair, which was about to open in Queens.

At the invitation of the architect Philip Johnson, Warhol had created a work for the New York State Pavilion called "Thirteen Most Wanted Men"—large silk screens of N.Y.P.D. mug shots (and a homoerotic pun). But the governor, Nelson Rockefeller, ordered the piece removed. It turned out that many of the wanted men not only had been exonerated but, more significant politically, had Italian names. Warhol proposed substituting a portrait of Robert Moses; when this was judged unacceptable, he painted over "Thirteen Most Wanted Men" with silver paint—a visible erasure that was widely read as a statement about censorship.

And, in the context, it was. New York City had decided to clean up its act for the World's Fair. Lenny Bruce had been arrested earlier that April, at the Café au Go Go, in the Village; a month before that, a showing of Jack Smith's underground movie "Flaming Creatures" was raided and many people were apprehended (including, according to one account, Harvey Milk). The atmosphere for new art had been electrified.

On the opening night of Warhol's show at the Stable, people were lined up on the street to get in. The exhibition consisted of some four hundred sculptures designed to look like cartons of Heinz ketchup, Del Monte peaches, Campbell's tomato juice, Mott's apple juice, Kellogg's Corn Flakes, and Brillo soap pads. The pieces were stacked in piles, requiring viewers to navigate the aisles cautiously (part of the reason for the crush outside).

It was the Brillo box that became the canonical work. This may be because of an unintended irony: the Brillo box was designed, in 1961, by an Abstract Expressionist painter named James Harvey, who did commercial work to support his art. In fact, Harvey went to the show. He was stunned to see his design replicated, and, later, his dealer protested. Warhol, as was his practice when plagiarism problems arose during his career (which they did frequently), offered Harvey one of the sculptures, and suggested that Harvey give him an autographed Brillo box in return. Harvey died before the deal could be transacted.

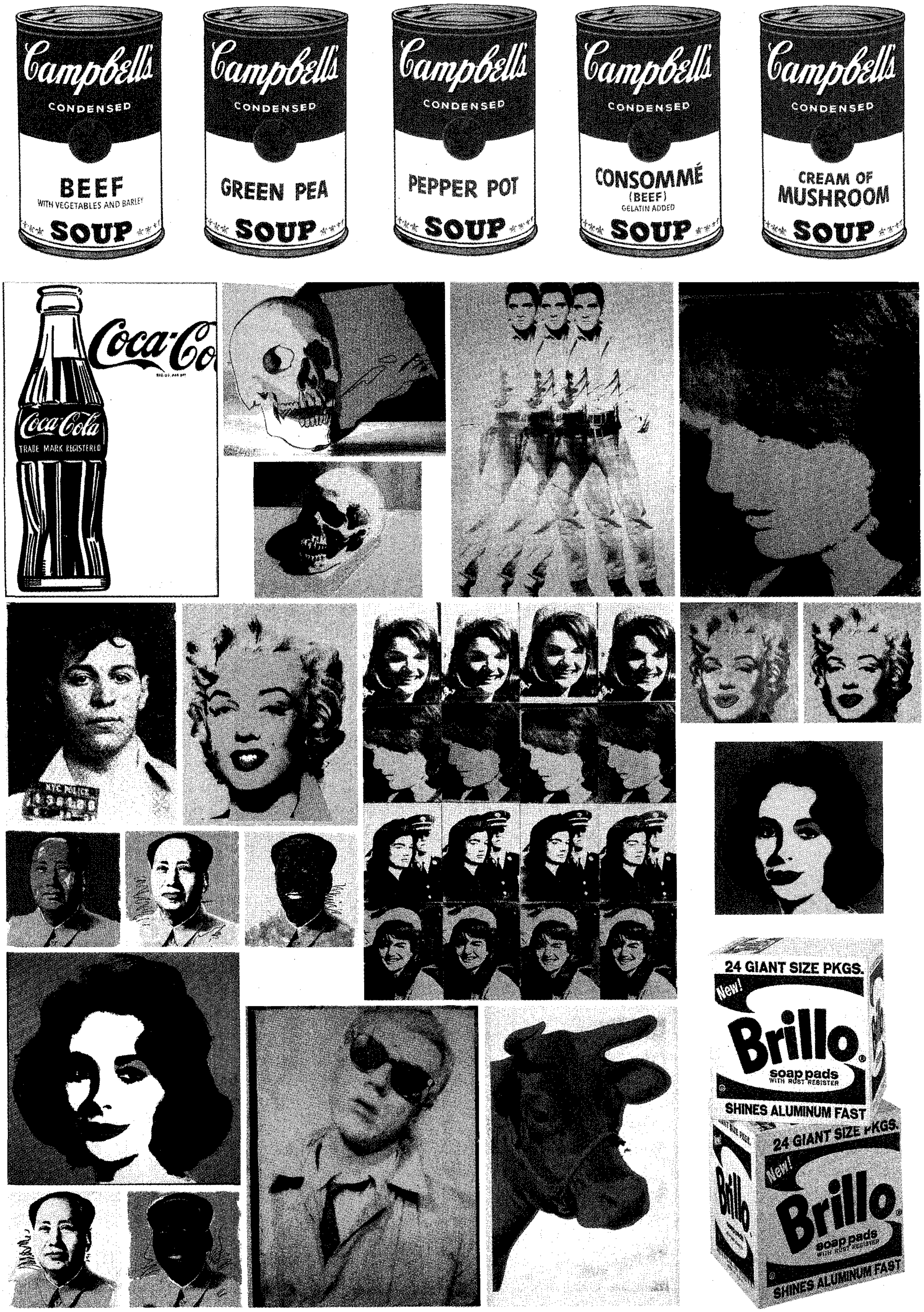
It was "a transformative experience for me," Danto says of the Stable show. "It turned me into a philosopher of art." Six months later, he published an article in the *Journal of Philosophy* called "The Artworld," in which he attempted to answer the question "Why is something that looks exactly like a Brillo box a work of art, but a Brillo box is not?" Danto's theory was that, in order to answer that question, you needed a theory. As he put it, "To see something as art requires something the eye cannot decry—an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an artworld." Someone who knew nothing about the history of art would never be able to see Warhol's Brillo box as anything but either a Brillo box or a prank. To use another example, you had to understand why, in 1960, a painting of a Coke bottle with hash marks counted as art in order to understand why a painting of a Coke bottle *without* hash marks might count as art. Danto saw the history of painting, from representational art through Impressionism, Cubism, and abstraction, as a series of manipulations of the relationship between art and reality. A wooden box painted to look like a grocery carton was just one more turn of that screw.

Seventeen years later, Danto had a second epiphany. The occasion was the 1981 Whitney Biennial, a show dominated by the neo-expressionist painting then in vogue—work by artists like Julian Schnabel. Danto's response, he later wrote, was: This is not what was supposed to happen next. But then he thought, So what was supposed to happen next? He realized that *nothing* had to happen next. All styles were now equally available. And he decided that, with the Brillo box, the history of art had come to an end. Art had become post-historical.

Danto did not mean that art would stop being made. He meant what Hegel meant when he wrote that history had come to an end: art had realized its possibilities. Technically, there was nothing more to be achieved. Art, as Danto put it, had become philosophy. In 1984, Danto became the art critic for *The Nation*, where his reviewing was informed by this view; the whole theory is elegantly elaborated in his 1995 Mellon lectures, "After the End of Art."

To understand the significance of

"CAMPBELL'S SOUP I" (1968)/ANDY WARHOL MUSEUM/© 2010 ANDY WARHOL FOUNDATION/ARS, NY/TRADEMARKS, CAMPBELL SOUP COMPANY;
"SIXTEEN JACKIES" (1964)/HENRI DAUMAN/ANDY WARHOL FOUNDATION/CORBIS; RED "LIZ" (1964)/ANDY WARHOL MUSEUM/© 2010 ANDY WARHOL FOUNDATION/ARS, NY;
SCALA/ART RESOURCE/© 2010 ANDY WARHOL FOUNDATION/ARS, NY; ALL OTHER ART: ANDY WARHOL FOUNDATION/CORBIS


Campbell's
CONDENSED
BEEF
WITH VEGETABLES AND BARLEY
SOUP
Campbell's
CONDENSED
GREEN PEA
SOUP
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PEPPER POT
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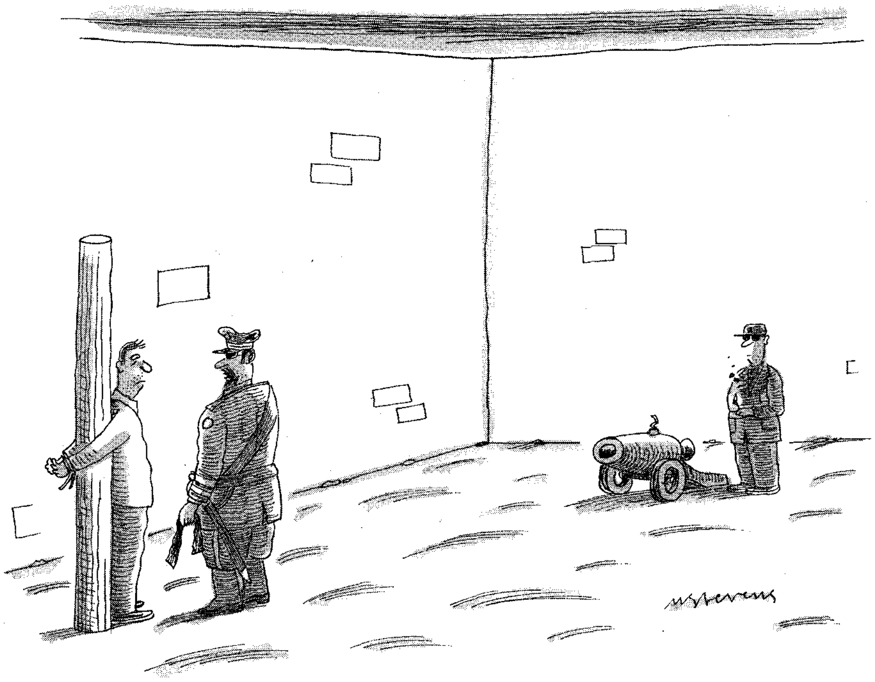
CONDENSED
CONSOMMÉ
(BEEF)
GELATIN ADDED
SOUP
Campbell's
CONDENSED
CREAM OF
MUSHROOM
SOUP
Coca-Co
Coca-Cola
TRADE MARK REGISTERED
NYC POLICE
24 GIANT SIZE PKGS.
New!
Brillo
soap pads
WITH RUST RESISTER
SHINES ALUMINUM FAST
24 GIANT SIZE PKGS.
New!
Brillo
soap pads
WITH RUST RESISTER
SHINES ALUMINUM FAST

Warhol wasn't hiding anything, and he wasn't out to trick anyone. He was only changing one rule, the most basic rule, of the game.



"They made some pretty drastic cuts in our execution budget."

Danto's theory, you need another theory. That theory is Clement Greenberg's. Greenberg was the critical champion of the Abstract Expressionists, especially of Jackson Pollock, whose work he was one of the first to appreciate. In essays and reviews in *Partisan Review* and *The Nation*—where he, too, served as art critic—Greenberg made the case for the historical necessity of abstraction. Avant-garde artists were compelled to make nonrepresentational paintings, he argued, because of the mass production of commercially manufactured culture—kitsch. Kitsch—popular fiction, Hollywood movies, and so on—was realistic, and its subject was the satisfactions of middle-class life under consumer capitalism. Avant-garde artists responded by making their subject art itself. Avant-garde art, Greenberg believed, was art that explored its own formal possibilities. It was art about art.

By 1960, Greenberg had become an advocate of the most rarefied kind of abstraction, painting that dispensed with representational illusion as much as possible. He was promoting resolutely two-dimensional, color-defined painting, work by artists such as Morris Louis, Kenneth Noland, and Jules Olitski. He regarded Pop as a silly diversion, art not difficult enough to be taken seriously. Not only was Pop representational; it represented comic books, advertisements, product designs—the world of kitsch. Pop art did not seem to be art about art.

Danto's point was that it was. Danto admired Greenberg, particularly his commitment to a historical explanation for the evolution of artistic styles. In becoming the champion of Pop, Danto was not out to debunk Greenberg. On the contrary: he wanted to show how the Brillo box addressed the very problem that Greenberg had set for modern art—the problem of art's relation to everyday reality. Pop art was not a frivolous repudiation of Abstract Expressionism—playful, figural, and superficial where Abstract Expressionism was soulful, abstract, and deep. It was the next step—as it turned out, the last step—in art's investigation of its own nature. Pop showed that in the end the only difference between an art work, such as a sculpture that looks like a grocery carton, and a real thing, such as a grocery carton, is that the first is received as art and the second is not. At that moment, art could be anything it wanted. The illusion-reality barrier had been broken.

"Andy had, by nature, a philosophical mind," Danto says in the new book; "he was really doing philosophy by doing the art that made him famous." This would have amused Warhol, but it does capture an important aspect of what he was up to. Marcel Duchamp loved the Campbell's soup can paintings because, he said, they freed art from the tyranny of the retinal image. You don't need to stare at the paintings to get them. It's the concept that provides the art content. Calling this content "philosophy" may be a little hyperbolic. There is conceptual content in a Pollock, too; there is, probably, if we could resurrect the circumstances, conceptual content in cave paintings. That doesn't quite make them philosophy. But it does mean that art is not the less art because it adds nothing visible to the original—which is the lesson of the two Coke bottles.

In his book, Danto acknowledges, though he does not respond to, an unpublished criticism of his interpretation of the Brillo box by the art historian Bertrand Rougé. (Rougé's article will appear in a forthcoming volume devoted to Danto's work as a philosopher.) Rougé points out that Warhol's Brillo boxes are not in fact identical to grocery cartons. The cartons are cardboard and offset printed; Warhol's pieces are wooden and silkscreened. The difference matters, Rougé argues, because putting an everyday object in an art gallery and thereby transforming it into "art" had already been done, and done famously, almost fifty years before, by Duchamp. Duchamp's snow shovel, urinal, bicycle wheel, and bottle rack—the pieces he called "ready-mades"—had raised the philosophical issues that Danto ascribed to Warhol's 1964 Stable show.

Rougé thinks that Warhol was not simply copying Duchamp (as people have accused him of doing). He was responding to Duchamp's ready-mades by creating objects that only look like ready-mades. Rougé calls Warhol's box sculptures trompe-l'oeil: they are lifelike illusions, but not illusions of something natural, like the legendary painted grapes of Zeuxis that the birds pecked at. They are illusions of a certain type of art, the ready-made, that presents itself as an art without illusions. Duchamp eliminated the element of imitation in art, and Warhol imitated him. He turned the screw one rotation farther than Danto realized. The Brillo boxes did not break the illusion-reality barrier at all. They were just one more move in the game; they didn't bring it to an end.

Because Warhol's work was usually sold piecemeal to collectors, it's easy to forget that, apart from the first Stable show, which included a variety of pieces, virtually all his art exhibitions were installations. (This is something that Danto seems to miss.) Warhol did make and sell one-offs of soup cans, Brillo boxes, and other works. But "32 Campbell's Soup Cans" was a single piece. So was the second Ferus show, the multiple silk screens of Elvis Presley. And so was the 1964 Stable show, with the box sculptures. By transforming an art gallery into a supermarket or a warehouse, Warhol was making a point that now seems banal, but that, at a time when the border between fine art and commercial culture was still earnestly policed, was a provocation: fine art is a commodity, too. It can even be mass-produced. The announcement for the second Stable show, written by Gene Swenson, had the bluntly ironic title "The Personality of the Artist." In this respect, even "32 Campbell's Soup Cans" is a formalist exercise. It is art about art.

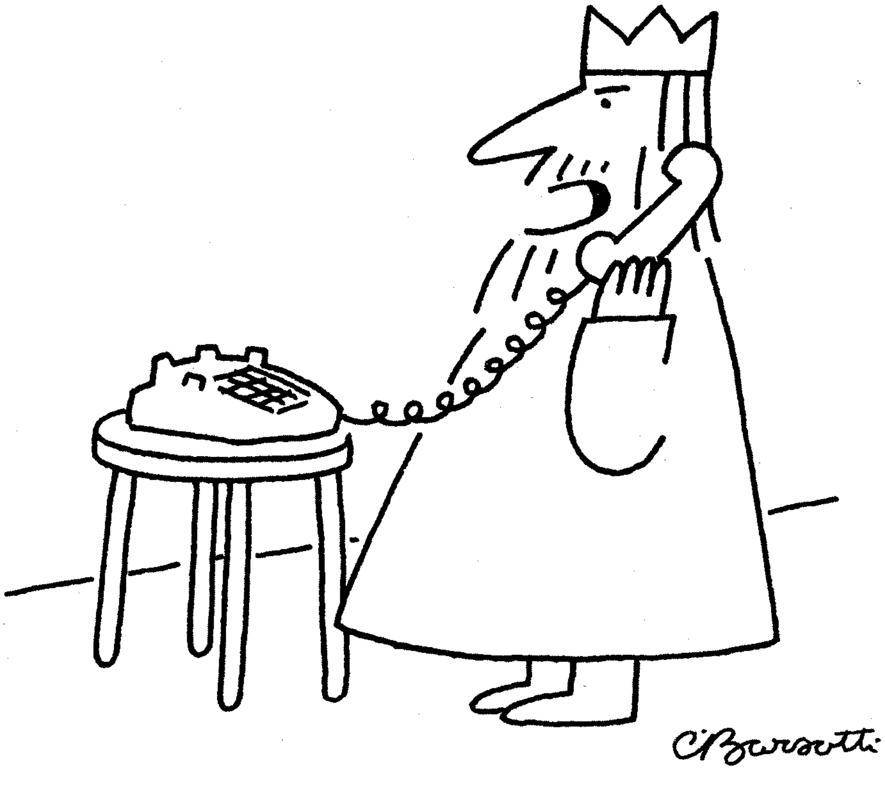
No one did more to promote the perception that he was a naïve interloper in the art world, a commercial illustrator who just didn't get what all the high seriousness was about, than Warhol himself. It is the most fundamental persona among his personae. After the "New Realists" exhibition at the Sidney Janis Gallery, in 1962, a show that launched Pop and seemed to signal the death of Abstract Expressionism (Janis represented many of the Abstract Expressionists, most of whom quit after the show), Warhol was asked by a reporter what he thought of Abstract Expressionism. He loved it, he said, "but I never did any; I don't know why, it's so easy." It was a beautiful decoy, and he stuck with it. When de Antonio interviewed Warhol for his 1972 documentary "Painters Painting," he asked him how he decided to become an artist. "You used to gossip about the art people," Warhol answered, "and that's how I found out about art."

But—and this is a point on which Scherman and Dalton are especially good—Warhol's life was devoted to art. Art is pretty much all he did. He collected it: in the nineteen-fifties, when he was still drawing shoe advertisements for a living, he owned works by Braque, Magritte, Miró, and Klee. He attended openings, screenings, and performances in every kind of venue, and he got to know most of the major figures in the New York art world, not only artists and dealers but poets, filmmakers, dancers, musicians, and critics. He rarely took a vacation, and his working methods were not shortcuts. It is not easy, even with assistants, to create four hundred imitation grocery cartons, or, as he did later on, two thousand Mao portraits. Warhol was fascinated by the boundary between the human and the mechanical. In his early films, he never moved the camera. He wanted to see how art would be appreciated if people believed that it came from a machine, or from a man who said that he wished he could be a machine.

The subject matter of Pop art is American culture. Even the British artists and writers who coined the term "pop," in the nineteen-fifties—the members of the Independent Group at the Institute for Contemporary Art, in London—used images from American movies and advertising in their work. But how American is Pop as an art form? People tend to think of Warhol's Coke bottles, Roy Lichtenstein's comic-strip panels, and James Rosenquist's futuristic billboards as expressing a specifically American idea of art. This chauvinism is part of the fallout from Greenberg.

Greenberg advanced, as much as anyone did, the idea that, with the Abstract Expressionists, the capital of art had moved from Paris to New York. But although it is true that the major Abstract Expressionists all made their art in America, they were certainly not all Americans. Rothko was born in Russia (though he was educated here); de Kooning was Dutch; Gorky was Armenian. The painter and teacher most closely associated with the development of abstraction in New York in the nineteen-thirties and forties, Hans Hofmann, was a German émigré. Between 1933 and 1944, some seven hundred artists came to the United States from other countries; in 1940, virtually every European surrealist, including Dali, was living in New York. So were Duchamp, Mondrian, Léger, and Chagall. This is the community in which Abstract Expressionism arose. It was an approach to painting derived as much from prewar Europe as from anything done in America.

The Pop artists got this. When Lichtenstein began painting from comic strips, around 1961, he said that he was looking to get away from "the European brushstroke." It was a calculated remark, since the visible brushstroke was an Abstract Expressionist signature; and it reveals the extent to which, by the early nineteen-six-



"Must you people always call during state dinners?"

ties, abstraction was associated with a European tradition. But the conclusion that Pop art represented liberation from Europe is also misplaced.

There is no single narrative of modern art. From one perspective, modern art can be interpreted as a movement toward formal purism, the way Greenberg interpreted it. From another perspective, though, modern art is all about impurity. Applied art, anti-art, art combining high and low elements, commercial and industrial design: they form a tradition that runs right alongside Cubism and abstraction. Pop art was a continuation of this second tradition, and Warhol's art in particular was made possible by two movements that were entirely European in origin and that emerged at the same time as abstraction: Bauhaus and Dada.

Carnegie Tech, where Warhol was trained, was founded to educate the children of steelworkers. Its course offerings in art prepared students for careers in fields like arts education, industrial design, and commercial art, which is what Warhol went into. Many of Warhol's classmates had careers as fine artists, but Carnegie was a place where the kind of pure/impure or fine-art/commercial-art distinctions that carried so much intellectual weight in the pages of *Partisan Review* and *The Nation* didn't mean much. One of Warhol's classmates at Carnegie Tech, Jack Wilson, recalled the exposure to mechanical methods of art-making at the school, and remembered lending Warhol a book by László Moholy-Nagy, called "Vision in Motion." He said that when Warhol returned it he spoke about it "with enthusiasm."

Moholy-Nagy was a Hungarian who taught at the Bauhaus, in Germany, in the nineteen-twenties, and who ended up in Chicago, where, in 1937, he became the director of the New Bauhaus School of Design. He was committed to the slogan "Art and Technology—A New Unity," and his writings questioned the elevation of fine or handmade art over mechanical and mass-produced design. "I was not at all afraid of losing the 'personal touch,' so highly valued in previous painting," he wrote in his autobiography, "Abstract of an Artist." "On the contrary, I even gave up signing my paintings. . . . I could not find any argument against the wide distribution of works of art, even if turned out by mass production." When Walter Benjamin wrote "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in 1936, he was intervening in a reconsideration of aesthetic values that had been long under way. Warhol's silk screens were offshoots of this branch of the modern-art tradition.

The influence of Dada was everywhere in New York in the nineteen-fifties. Duchamp himself, though he claimed to have stopped making art, was a well-known presence. But it was the early work of Rauschenberg and Johns, and their friends John Cage and Merce Cunningham, that transformed strategies for inverting or ignoring conventional aesthetic practice, and for abandoning control of the art-making process, into a new kind of art. They were at this long before Warhol became known. Cage's "silent piece" for piano, "4' 33"," premièred in 1952. Rauschenberg's "Automobile Tire Piece," made with Cage—a twenty-two-foot-long ink print of a tire track—was created in 1953, the same year as his "Erased de Kooning Drawing," for which he erased a drawing that de Kooning had given him. Rauschenberg took Johns to see the Duchamp collection at the Philadelphia Museum of Art; it made a deep impression on him, and he later wrote a piece for an art magazine about Duchamp's work. "I'm entirely sympathetic to everything that he has ever done," he later said.

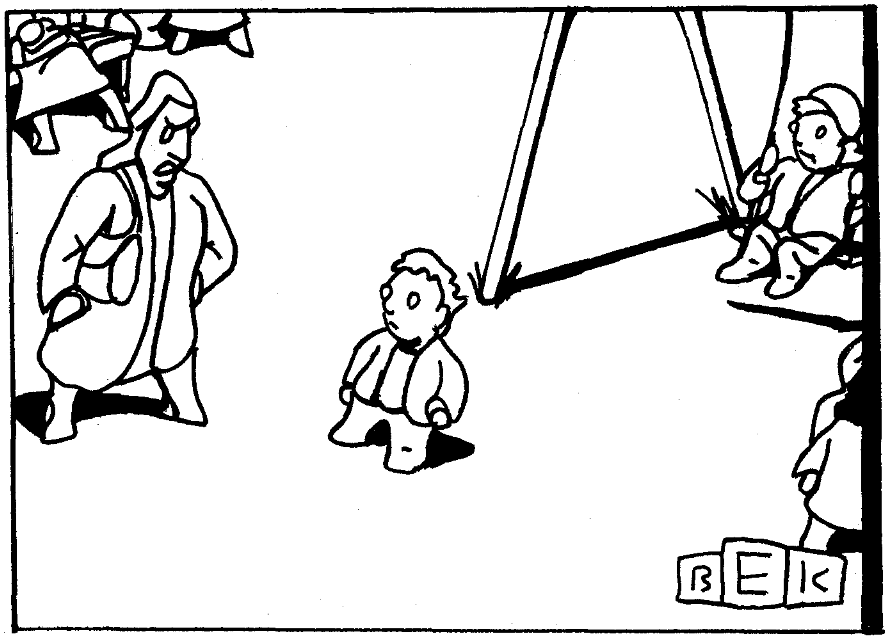
Johns's "Painted Bronze" sculptures—one of two Ballantine ale cans, the other of a coffee can with paintbrushes in it—were made in 1960. His sendup of Abstract Expressionist machismo, "Painting with Two Balls"—a big, drippy abstraction with two steel balls forlornly squeezed into the canvas—was also painted that year. In 1961, Allan Kaprow, the inventor of the "happening," displayed "Yard," a pile of automobile tires, at the Martha Jackson Gallery; Claes Oldenburg opened "The Store," an East Village storefront with plaster replicas of consumer goods for sale; the French artist Arman, one of the Nouveaux Réalistes, had an exhibition of ready-mades in New York; and Arman's friend Yves Klein had a show of identical "International Klein Blue" monochromes at Castelli. You didn't need a Brillo box to know which way the wind blew.

In fact, as Gary Indiana points out, Warhol was the last of the major Pop artists to be discovered. Lichtenstein, Rosenquist, and Jim Dine—all of whom came to Pop-art styles and subjects independently of one another—had shows before Warhol exhibited the soup-can paintings. There is no point in arguing about whether Pop would have happened without Warhol. Pop did happen without him.

The history of art did not need Warhol to change course away from Abstract Expressionism and from formalist ideas of what art should be. Warhol's work did challenge those things, but so did the work of many other artists in the "impurist" avant-garde tradition. What makes Warhol important was his challenge to the impurist tradition itself.

Warhol had, after all, spent more than a decade closely studying the New York avant-garde, and he understood all the ways in which it compromised its own program. As the art historian Benjamin Buchloh has argued, Warhol's silk screens of pop images like Elizabeth Taylor and Elvis were provocations directed not at the high-low art police, people like Greenberg and Hilton Kramer, but at the very artists who had apparently already solved the high-low problem. Warhol's work made art that was once considered audacious, like Johns's "Target" (1958) and Rauschenberg's "Monogram" (1955-59), a stuffed goat with a tire around it, seem fussy and recondite, art-world in-jokes.

Warhol made the Marilyns immediately after Monroe's death. He produced the Lizes when Taylor was in the hospital and reportedly dying. The Jackies were silk-screened from photographs taken during J.F.K.'s funeral. These were pieces that spoke directly to general states of feeling about beauty and mortality—a very hard thing for a serious artist to do in 1962 and 1963. Warhol saw that people like Oldenburg, Rauschenberg, and Johns were still doing high-art things with low-art materials (and this was true of Lichtenstein and Rosenquist as well). None of those artists could have taken on a subject like Marilyn or Jackie without twisting every which way to avoid the appearance of sentimentality. They were all operating safely behind the ramparts of highbrow taste. Johns made a work called "Flag on Orange Field"; Warhol made "Gold Marilyn Monroe." Oldenburg made sculptures of individual consumer goods; Warhol produced multiple identical sculptures of the cartons that consumer goods come in. Rauschenberg silk-screened bits and pieces from magazines and newspapers; Warhol silk-screened money. Warhol looked at the players sitting around the table of the New York avant-garde, and he raised the ante.



"Mommy needs to get mad at you in a weird calm voice now."

This is true of the movies as well, which Warhol devoted most of his time to between 1965, when he announced his retirement from painting, and 1968. Formally, "Sleep" and "Empire" are programmatically the opposite of the poetic, dreamy, phantasmagorical underground movies being made in New York at the time—movies like Smith's polymorphous-perverse "Flaming Creatures." In "Sleep," nearly six and a half hours of a man sleeping, we see dreaming exactly the way the camera sees it. The harder underground filmmakers worked to undermine cinematic convention, the more cinematic their movies became. Warhol made movies that eliminated (along with the acting and the drama) the cinematic. He found that people who could sit through them experienced them as cinema.

After the shooting, everything changed. The experience naturally terrified Warhol. He had recently moved to a new studio, on Union Square, and he quickly dispensed with what remained in his entourage of the Factory-era crazies. But the culture had changed, too. Two days after Warhol was shot, Robert Kennedy was assassinated, in Los Angeles. Scherman and Dalton report that a profile of Warhol, by David Bourdon, had been scheduled for the cover of *Life*, but that after Kennedy's death the story was killed. *Time* blamed Warhol for his own shooting: "Americans who deplore crime and disorder might consider the case of Andy Warhol, who for years has celebrated every form of licentiousness. Like some Nathanael West hero, the pop-art king was the blond guru of a nightmare world, photographing depravity and calling it truth. He surrounded himself with freakily named people—Viva, Ultra Violet, International Velvet, Ingrid Superstar—playing games of lust, perversion, drug addiction and brutality before his crotchety cameras. . . . As he fought for life in a hospital, pals insisted that he had not brought it on himself." The Warhol sixties were over. (Solanas got three years. Warhol was always afraid that she would strike again.)

The first works that Warhol made after he recovered, in August, 1968, were a portrait of Happy Rockefeller and an advertisement for Schrafft's. Warhol had never made much money in the Factory years—only a couple of boxes in the second Stable show sold, and his second show at Castelli, in 1966, of cow wallpaper and silver balloons, didn't do much better—but, under the management of Fred Hughes, he began churning out celebrity portraits on commission. By the nineteen-eighties, he was making between one and two million dollars a year on the portraits. He announced that he had embarked on a new kind of art, "business art." This is the Warhol from whom figures like Jeff Koons and Damien Hirst are descended.

Warhol also created some astonishing silk screens in the post-Factory years—the Mao portraits, the sunsets that look like mushroom clouds, the skulls, the Last Suppers. But the aura of wealth and privilege that he cultivated, hanging out with Steve Rubell and the Shah of Iran, and that he celebrated in his magazine, *Interview*, made it hard to appreciate the art. Warhol's anti-bohemianism just seemed like what everyone else was aspiring to in the Reagan era. He was changing one of the rules of the game, a rule about how artists were supposed to live, but this time he failed to make it interesting.

Still, whether or not his work continues to shape the course of art, it certainly defines the market. The art world was thrown into uncertainty by the recession, but Warhol's works didn't seem to lose liquidity or value. This November, his silk screen "200 One Dollar Bills" (1962) was sold for $43.7 million, more than a hundred times what the owner paid for it in 1986—proving, among other things, that something that looks like two hundred dollars is not the same thing as two hundred dollars. ♦

FICTION

SAFARI

BY JENNIFER EGAN

"Remember, Charlie? In Hawaii? When we went to the beach at night and it started to rain?" Rolph is talking to his older sister, Charlene, who despises her real name. But because they're crouched around a bonfire with the other people on the safari, and because Rolph doesn't speak up all that often, and because their father, Lou, sitting behind them on a camp chair, is a record producer whose personal life is of general interest, those near enough to hear are listening closely. "Remember? How Mom and Dad stayed at the table for one more drink—"

"Impossible," their father interjects, with a wink at the elderly bird-watching ladies to his left. Both women wear their binoculars even in the dark, as if hoping to spot birds in the firelit tree overhead.

"Remember, Charlie? How the beach was still warm, and that crazy wind was blowing?"

But Charlie is focussed on her father's legs, which have intertwined behind her with those of his girlfriend, Mindy. Soon Lou and Mindy will bid the group good night and retreat to their tent, where they'll make love on one of its narrow rickety cots, or possibly on the ground. From the adjacent tent, which she and Rolph share, Charlie, who is fourteen, can hear them—not sounds, exactly, but movement. Rolph, at eleven, is too young to notice.

Charlie throws back her head, startling her father. Lou is in his late thirties, his square-jawed surfer's face gone a little draggy under the eyes. "You were married to Mom on that trip," she informs him, her voice distorted by the arching of her neck, which is encircled by a puka-shell choker.

"Yes, Charlie," Lou says. "I'm aware of that."

The bird-watching ladies trade a sad smile. Lou is one of those men whose restless charm has generated a contrail of personal upheaval that is practically visible behind him: two failed marriages and two more kids back home in L.A., who were too young to bring on this three-week safari. The safari is a new business venture of Lou's old Army buddy Ramsey, with whom he drank and misbehaved, having barely avoided Korea almost twenty years ago.

RICH TU

Rolph pulls at his sister's shoulder. He wants her to remember, to feel it all again: the wind, the endless black ocean, the two of them peering into the dark as if awaiting a signal from their distant, grownup lives. "Remember, Charlie?"

"Yeah," Charlie says, narrowing her eyes. "I do remember that."

The Samburu warriors have arrived—four of them, two holding drums, and a child in the shadows minding a yellow long-horned cow. They came yesterday, too, after the morning game run, when Lou and Mindy were "napping." That was when Charlie exchanged shy glances with the most beautiful warrior, who has scar-tissue designs coiled like railroad tracks over the rigorous architecture of his chest and shoulders and back.

Charlie stands up and moves closer to the warriors: a slender girl in shorts and a raw-cotton shirt with small round buttons made of wood. Her teeth are slightly crooked. When the drummers pat their drums, Charlie's warrior and the other one begin to sing: guttural noises pried from their abdomens. She sways in front of them. During her ten days in Africa, she has begun to act differently—like one of the girls who intimidate her back home. In a cinder-block town that the group visited a few days ago, she drank a muddy-looking concoction in a bar and wound up trading away her silver butterfly earrings (a birthday gift from her father) in a hut belonging to a very young woman whose breasts were leaking milk. She was late returning to the jeeps; Albert, who works for Ramsey, had to go and find her. "Prepare yourself," he warned. "Your dad is having kittens." Charlie didn't care then, and doesn't now; there's a charge for her in simply commanding the fickle beam of her father's attention, feeling his disquiet as she dances, alone, by the fire.

Lou lets go of Mindy's hand and sits up straight. He has an urge to grab his daughter's skinny arm and yank her away from the warriors, but does no such thing, of course. That would be letting her win.

The warrior smiles at Charlie. He's nineteen, and has lived away from his village since he was ten. But he has sung for enough American tourists to recognize that, in her world, Charlie is a child.

"Son," Lou says, into Rolph's ear, "let's take a walk."

The boy rises from the dust and walks with his father away from the fire. Twelve tents, each sleeping two safari guests, form a circle around it, along with three outhouses and a shower stall, where water warmed on the fire is released from a sack with a rope pull. Out of view are some smaller tents for the staff, and then the black, muttering expanse of the bush, where they've been cautioned never to go.

"Your sister's acting nuts," Lou says, striding into the dark.

"Why?" Rolph asks. He hasn't noticed anything nutty in Charlie's behavior. But his father hears the question differently.

"Women are crazy," he says. "You could spend a goddam lifetime trying to figure out why."

"Mom's not."

"True," Lou reflects, calmer now. "In fact, your mother's not crazy enough."

The singing and drumbeats fall suddenly away, leaving Lou and Rolph alone under a sharp moon.

"What about Mindy?" Rolph asks. "Is she crazy?"

"Good question," Lou says. "What do you think?"

"She likes to read. She brought a lot of books."

"Did she?"

"I like her," Rolph says. "But I don't know if she's crazy. Or what the right amount is."

Lou puts his arm around Rolph. If he were an introspective man, he would have understood years ago that his son is the one person in the world who has the power to soothe him. And that, although he expects Rolph to resemble him, what he most enjoys in his son is the many ways in which he is different: quiet, reflective, attuned to the natural world and the pain of others.

"Who cares," Lou says. "Right?"

"Right," Rolph says, and the women fall away like the drumbeats, leaving him and his father together, an invincible unit amid the burbling, whispering bush. The sky is crammed with stars. Rolph closes his eyes and opens them again. He is in Africa with his father. He thinks, I'll remember this night for the rest of my life. And he's right.

When they finally return to camp,

the warriors have gone. Only a few diehards from the Phoenix faction (as Lou calls the safari members who hail from there) are still sitting by the fire, comparing the day's animal sightings. Rolph creeps into his tent, pulls off his pants, and climbs onto his cot in a T-shirt and underwear. He assumes that Charlie is asleep. When she speaks, he can hear in her voice that she's been crying.

"Where did you go?" she says.

"What on earth have you got in that backpack?"

It's Cora, Lou's travel agent. She hates Mindy, but Mindy doesn't take it personally—it's structural hatred, a term she coined herself and is finding highly useful on this trip. A single woman in her forties who wears high-collared shirts to conceal the thready sinews of her neck will structurally despise the twenty-three-year-old girlfriend of a powerful male who not only employs said middle-aged female but is paying her way on this trip.

"Anthropology books," Mindy tells Cora. "I'm in the Ph.D. program at Berkeley."

"Why don't you read them?"

"Carsick," Mindy says, which is plausible, God knows, in the shuddering jeeps, though untrue. She isn't sure why she hasn't cracked her Boas or Malinowski or Julian Jaynes, but assumes that she must be acquiring knowledge in other ways that will prove equally fruitful. In bold moments, fuelled by the boiled black coffee that is served each morning in the meal tent, Mindy has even wondered whether her insights on the links between social structure and emotional response amount to more than a rehash of Lévi-Strauss—a refinement, a contemporary application. She's only in her second year of coursework.

Their jeep is the last in a line of five, nosing along a dirt road through grassland whose apparent brown masks a wide internal spectrum of color: purples, greens, reds. Albert, the surly Englishman who is Ramsey's second-in-command, is driving. Mindy has managed to avoid Albert's jeep for several days, but he has developed a reputation for discovering the best animals, so although there's no game run today—they're relocating to the hills, where they'll spend the night in a hotel for the first time this trip—the children begged to ride with him. And keeping Lou's children happy, or as close to happy as is structurally possible, is part of Mindy's job.

Structural resentment: The adolescent daughter of a twice-divorced male will be unable to tolerate the presence of his new girlfriend, and will do everything in her limited power to distract him from said girlfriend's presence, her own nascent sexuality being her chief weapon.

Structural affection: A twice-divorced male's preadolescent son (and favorite child) will embrace and accept his father's new girlfriend because he hasn't yet learned to separate his father's loves and desires from his own. In a sense, he, too, will love and desire her, and she will feel maternal toward him, though she isn't old enough to be his mother.

Structural incompatibility: A powerful twice-divorced male will be unable to acknowledge, much less sanction, the ambitions of a much younger female mate. By definition, their relationship will be temporary.

Structural desire: The much younger temporary female mate of a powerful male will be inexorably drawn to the single male within range who disdains her mate's power.

Albert drives with one elbow out the window. He has been a largely silent presence on this safari, eating quickly in the meal tent, providing terse answers to people's questions ("Where do you live?" "Mombasa." "How long have you been in Africa?" "Eight years." "What brought you here?" "This and that"). He rarely joins the group around the fire after dinner. On a trip to the outhouse one night, Mindy glimpsed him at the other fire, near the staff tents, drinking a beer and laughing with the Kikuyu drivers. With the tour group, he rarely smiles. Whenever his eyes happen to graze Mindy's, she senses that he feels shame on her behalf: because of her prettiness; because she sleeps with Lou; because she keeps telling herself that this trip constitutes anthropological research into group dynamics and ethnographic enclaves, when really what she's after is luxury, adventure, and a break from her four insomniac roommates.

Next to Albert, in the shotgun seat, Chronos is ranting about animals. He's the bassist for the Mat Hatters, one of the groups that Lou produces, and has come on the trip as Lou's guest, along with the Hatters' guitarist and a girlfriend each. These four are locked in a visceral animal-sighting competition. (*Structural fixation:* A collective, contextually induced obsession that becomes a temporary locus of greed, competition, and envy.) They challenge one another nightly over who saw more and at what range, invoking witnesses from their respective jeeps and promising definitive proof when they develop their film, back home.

Behind Albert sits Cora, the travel agent, and beside her, gazing out his window, is Dean, a blond actor whose genius for stating the obvious—"It's hot," or "The sun is setting," or "There aren't many trees"—is a staple source of amusement for Mindy. Dean is starring in a movie whose soundtrack Lou is helping to create; the presumption seems to be that its release will bring Dean immediate and stratospheric fame. In the seat behind him, Rolph and Charlie are showing their *Mad* magazine to Mildred, one of the bird-watching ladies. She or her companion, Fiona, can usually be found near Lou, who flirts with them tirelessly and needles them to take him bird-watching. His indulgence of these women in their seventies (strangers to him before this trip) intrigues Mindy; she can find no structural reason for it.

In the last row, beside Mindy, Lou opens the large aluminum case where his new camera is partitioned in its foam padding, like a dismantled rifle, and thrusts his torso from the open roof, ignoring the rule to stay seated while the jeep is moving. Albert swerves suddenly, and Lou is knocked back down, camera smacking his forehead. He swears at Albert, but the words are lost in the jeep's wobbly jostle through tall grass. After a minute or two of chaotic driving, they emerge a few feet from a pride of lions. Everyone gawks in startled silence—it's the closest they've been to any animal on this trip. The motor is still running, Albert's hand tentatively on the wheel, but the lions appear so relaxed, so indifferent, that he kills the engine. In the ticking motor silence they can hear the lions breathe: two females, one male, three cubs. The cubs and one of the females are gorging on a bloody zebra carcass. The others are dozing.

"They're eating," Dean says.

Chronos's hands shake as he spools film into his camera. "Fuck," he keeps muttering. "Fuck."

Albert lights a cigarette—forbidden in the brush—and waits, as indifferent to the scene as if he had paused outside a rest room.

"Can we stand?" the children ask. "Is it safe?"

"I'm sure as hell going to," Lou says.

Lou, Charlie, Rolph, Chronos, and Dean all climb onto their seats and jam their upper halves through the open roof. Mindy is now effectively alone inside the jeep with Albert, Cora, and Mildred, who peers at the lions through her bird-watching binoculars.

"How did you know?" Mindy asks, after a silence.

Albert swivels around to look at her down the length of the jeep. He has unruly hair and a soft brown mustache. There is a suggestion of humor in his face. "Just a guess."

"From half a mile away?"

"He probably has a sixth sense," Cora says, "after so many years here."

Albert turns back around and blows smoke through his open window.

"Did you see something?" Mindy says, persisting.

She doesn't expect Albert to turn again, but he does, leaning over the back of his seat, his eyes meeting hers between the children's bare legs. Mindy feels a jolt of attraction roughly akin to having someone seize her intestines and twist. She understands now that it's mutual; she sees this in Albert's face.

"Broken bushes," he says. "Like something got chased. It could have been nothing."

Cora, sensing her exclusion, sighs wearily. "Can someone come down so I can look, too?" she calls to those above the roof.

"Coming," Lou says, but Chronos is faster, ducking back into the front seat and then leaning out his window. Cora rises in her big print skirt. Mindy's face pounds with blood. Her own window, like Albert's, is on the jeep's left side, facing away from the lions. Mindy watches him wet his fingers and snuff out his cigarette. They sit in silence, hands dangling separately from their windows, a warm breeze stirring the hair on their arms, ignoring the most spectacular animal sighting of the safari.

UNDERCOVER
FASHION
POLICE
Leo Cullum

"You're driving me crazy," Albert says, very softly. The sound seems to travel out his window and back in through Mindy's, like one of those whispering tubes. "You must know that."

"I didn't," she murmurs back.

"Well, you are."

"My hands are tied."

"Forever?"

She smiles. "Please. An interlude."

"Then?"

"Grad school. Berkeley."

Albert chuckles. Mindy isn't sure what the chuckle means—is it funny that she's in graduate school, or that Berkeley and Mombasa, where he lives, are irreconcilable locations?

"Chronos, you crazy fuck, get back in here."

It's Lou's voice, from overhead. But Mindy feels sluggish, almost drugged, and reacts only when she hears the change in Albert's voice. "No," he hisses. "No! Back in the jeep."

Chronos is skulking among the lions, holding his camera close to the faces of the sleeping male and female, taking pictures.

"Walk backward," Albert says, with hushed urgency. "Backward, Chronos, gently."

Movement comes from a direction that no one is expecting: the lioness gnawing at the zebra. She vaults at Chronos in an agile, gravity-defying spring that anyone with a house cat would recognize. She lands on his head, flattening him instantly. There are screams, a gunshot, and those overhead tumble back into their seats so violently that at first Mindy thinks they've been shot. But it's the lioness; Albert has killed her with a rifle he'd secreted somewhere, maybe under his seat. The other lions have scattered; all that's left is the zebra carcass and the body of the lioness, Chronos's legs splayed beneath her.

Albert, Lou, Dean, and Cora bolt from the jeep. Mindy starts to follow, but Lou pushes her back, and she realizes that he wants her to stay with his children. She leans over the back of their seat and puts an arm around each of them. As they stare through the open windows, a wave of nausea rolls through Mindy; she feels in danger of passing out. Mildred is still in her spot beside the children, and it occurs to Mindy, vaguely, that the elderly bird-watcher was inside the jeep the whole time that she and Albert were talking.

"Is Chronos dead?" Rolph asks flatly.

"I'm sure he's not," Mindy says.

"Why isn't he moving?"

"The lion is on top of him. See, they're pulling her off. He's probably fine under there."

"There's blood on the lion's mouth," Charlie says.

"That's from the zebra. Remember,

she was eating the zebra?" It takes enormous effort to keep her teeth from chattering, but Mindy knows that she must hide her terror from the children—her belief that whatever turns out to have happened is her fault.

They wait in pulsing isolation, surrounded by the hot, blank day. Mildred rests a knobby hand on Mindy's shoulder, and Mindy feels her eyes fill with tears. "He'll be fine," the old woman says gently. "You watch."

By the time the group assembles in the bar of the mountain hotel after dinner, everyone seems to have gained something. Chronos has won a blistering victory over his bandmate and both girlfriends, at the cost of thirty-two stitches on his left cheek that you could argue are also a gain (he's a rock star, after all) and several huge antibiotic pills administered by an English surgeon with hooded eyes and beery breath—an old friend of Albert's, whom he unearthed in a cinder-block town about an hour away from the lions.

Albert has gained the status of a hero, though you wouldn't know it to look at him. He gulps a bourbon and mutters his responses to the giddy queries of the Phoenix faction. No one has yet confronted him on the damning basics: Why were you in the bush? How did you get so close to the lions? Why didn't you stop Chronos from getting out of the jeep? But Albert knows that Ramsey, his boss, will ask these questions, and that they will likely lead to his being fired: the latest in a series of failures brought on by what his mother, back in Minehead, calls his "self-destructive tendencies."

The passengers in Albert's jeep have gained a story that they'll tell for the rest of their lives. They are witnesses, to be questioned endlessly about what they saw and heard and felt. A gang of children, including Rolph, Charlie, a set of eight-year-old twin boys from Phoenix, and Louise, a chubby twelve-year-old, leave the bar and stampede along a slatted path to a blind beside a watering hole: a wooden hut full of long benches with a slot they can peek through, invisible to the animals. It's dark inside. They rush to the slot, but no animals are drinking at the moment.

"Did you actually see the lion?" Louise asks, with wonder.

"Lion*ess*," Rolph says. "There were two, plus a lion. And three cubs."

"She means the one that got shot," Charlie says, impatiently. "Obviously we saw it. We were inches away!"

"Feet," Rolph says, correcting her.

"Feet are *made* out of inches," Charlie says. "We saw everything."

Rolph has already started to hate these conversations—the panting excitement behind them, the way Charlie seems to revel in it. A thought has been troubling him. "I wonder what will happen to the cubs," he says. "The lioness who got shot must have been their mom—she was eating with them."

"Not necessarily," Charlie says.

"But if she was."

"Maybe the dad will take care of them," Charlie says, doubtfully. The other children are quiet, considering the question.

"Lions tend to raise their cubs communally"—a voice comes from the far end of the blind. Mildred and Fiona were already there or have just arrived; being old and female, they're easily missed. "The pride will likely take care of them," Fiona says, "even if the one killed was their mother."

"Which it might not have been," Charlie adds.

"Which it might not have been," Mildred agrees.

It doesn't occur to the children to ask Mildred, who was also in the jeep, what she saw.

"I'm going back," Rolph tells his sister.

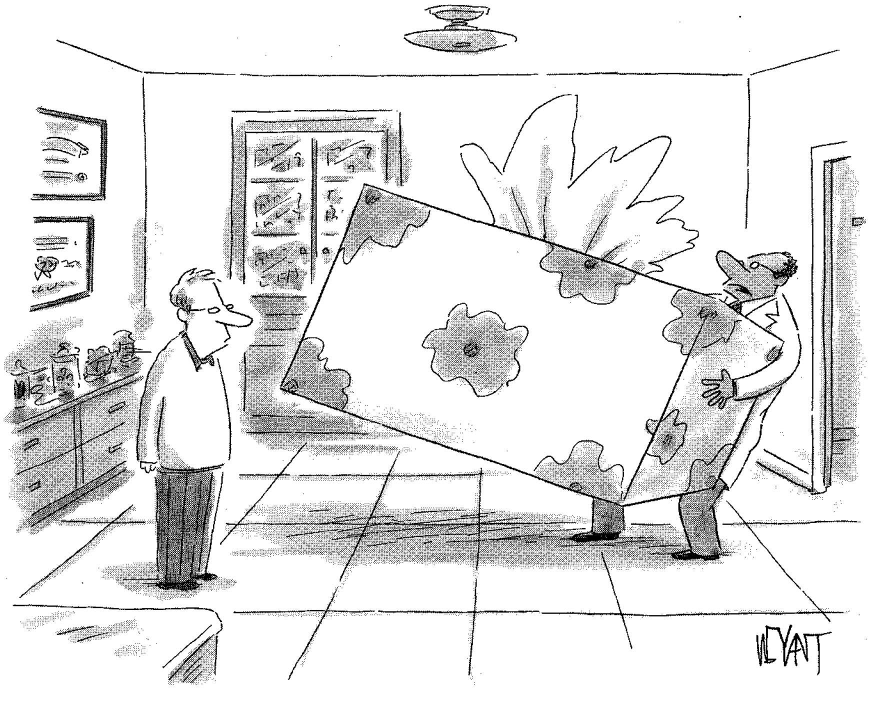
He follows the path up to the hotel. His father and Mindy are still in the smoky bar; the strange, celebratory feeling unnerves Rolph. His mind bends again and again to the jeep, but his memories are a muddle: the lioness springing; a jerk of impact from the gun; Chronos moaning during the drive to the doctor, blood collecting in an actual puddle under his head on the floor of the jeep, like in a comic book. All of it is suffused with the feel of Mindy holding him from behind, her cheek against his head, her smell: not bready, like his mom's, but salty, bitter almost—a smell that seems akin to that of the lions themselves.

He stands by his father, who pauses in the middle of an Army story he's telling with Ramsey. "You tired, son?"

"Want me to walk you upstairs?" Mindy asks, and Rolph nods: he does want that.

The blue, mosquito-y night pushes in from the hotel windows. Outside the bar, Rolph is suddenly less tired. Mindy collects his key from the front desk, then says, "Let's go out on the porch."

They step outside. Dark as it is, the



"We're out of flu shots."

silhouettes of mountains against the sky are even darker. Rolph can dimly hear the voices of the other children, down in the blind. He's relieved to have escaped them. He stands with Mindy at the edge of the porch and looks at the mountains. Rolph senses her waiting for something and he waits, too, his heart stamping.

There is a cough farther down the porch. Rolph sees the orange tip of a cigarette move in the dark, and Albert comes toward them with a creak of boots. "Hello there," he says to Rolph. He doesn't speak to Mindy, and Rolph decides that the one hello must be for both of them.

"Hello," he greets Albert.

"What are you up to?" Albert asks.

Rolph turns to Mindy. "What are we up to?"

"Enjoying the night," she says, still facing the mountains, but her voice is tense. "We should go up," she tells Rolph, and walks abruptly back inside. Rolph is troubled by her rudeness. "Are you coming?" he asks Albert.

"Why not?"

As the three of them ascend the stairs, Rolph feels an odd pressure to make conversation. "Is your room up here, too?" he asks.

"Down the hall," Albert says. "Room 3."

Mindy unlocks the door to Rolph's room and steps in, leaving Albert in the hall. Rolph is suddenly angry with her.

"Want to see my room?" he asks Albert. "Mine and Charlie's?"

Mindy emits a single syllable of laughter—the way his mother laughs when things have annoyed her to the point of absurdity. Albert steps into his room. It's plain, with wooden furniture and dusty flowered curtains, but after ten nights in tents it feels lavish.

"Very nice," Albert says. Mindy crosses her arms and stares out the window. There is a feeling in the room that Rolph can't identify. He's angry with Mindy and thinks that Albert must be, too. *Women are crazy.* Mindy's body is slender and elastic; she could slip through a keyhole, or under a door. Her thin purple sweater rises and falls quickly as she breathes. Rolph is surprised by how angry he is.

Albert taps a cigarette from his pack, but doesn't light it. It is unfiltered, tobacco emerging from both ends. "Well," he says. "Good night, you two."

Rolph had imagined Mindy tucking him into bed, her arm around him as it was in the jeep. Now this seems out of the question. He can't change into his pajamas with Mindy there; he doesn't even want her to *see* his pajamas, which have small blue elves all over them. "I'm fine," he tells her, hearing the coldness in his voice. "You can go back."

"O.K.," she says. She turns down his bed, plumps the pillow, adjusts the open window. Rolph senses her finding reasons not to leave the room.

"Your dad and I will be just next door," Mindy says. "You know that, right?"

"Duh," he mutters. Then, chastened, he says, "I know."

Five days later, they take a long, very old train overnight to Mombasa. Every few minutes, it slows down just enough for people to leap from the doors, bundles clutched to their chests, and for others to scramble on. Lou's group and the Phoenix faction install themselves in the cramped bar car, which they share with African men in suits and bowler hats. Charlie is allowed to drink one beer, but she sneaks two more with the help of handsome Dean, who stands beside her narrow barstool. "You're sunburned," he says, pressing a finger to Charlie's cheek. "The African sun is strong."

"True," Charlie says, grinning as she swigs her beer. Now that Mindy has pointed out Dean's platitudes, Charlie finds him hilarious.

"You have to wear sunscreen," he says.

"I know—I did."

"Once isn't enough. You have to reapply."

Charlie catches Mindy's eye and succumbs to giggles. Her father moves close. "What's so funny?"

"Life," Charlie says, leaning against him.

"*Life!*" Lou snorts. "How old are you?"

He hugs her to him. When Charlie was little, he did this all the time, but as she grows older it happens less. Her father is warm, almost hot, his heartbeat like someone banging on a heavy door.

"Ow," Lou says. "Your quill is stabbing me." It's a black-and-white porcupine quill—she found it in the hills and uses it to pin up her long hair. Her father slides it out, and the tangled golden mass of Charlie's hair collapses onto her shoulders like a shattered window. She's aware of Dean watching.

"I like this," Lou says, squinting at the quill's translucent point. "It's a dangerous weapon."

"Weapons are necessary," Dean says.

By the next afternoon, the safari-goers have settled into a hotel a half hour up the coast from Mombasa. On a white beach traversed by knobby-chested men selling beads and gourds, Mildred and Fiona gamely appear in floral-print swimsuits, binoculars still at their necks. The livid Medusa tattoo on Chronos's chest is less startling than his small potbelly—a disillusioning trait he shares with a number of the men, though not Lou, who is lean, a little ropy, tanned from occasional surfing. He walks toward the cream-colored sea with his arm around Mindy, who looks even better than expected (and expectations were high) in her sparkling blue bikini.

After a swim, Lou goes in search of spears and snorkeling gear, resisting the temptation to follow Mindy back to their room, though clearly she'd like him to. She's gone bananas in the sack since they left the tents—hungry for it now, pawing Lou's clothes off at odd moments, ready to start again when he's barely finished. He feels tenderly toward Mindy, now that the trip is winding down. She's studying at Berkeley, and Lou has never travelled for a woman. It's doubtful that he'll lay eyes on her again.

Rolph and Charlie are reading in the sand under a palm tree when Lou gets back with the snorkeling equipment, but Rolph puts aside "The Hobbit" without protest and stands. Charlie ignores them, and Lou wonders momentarily if he should have included her. He and Rolph walk to the edge of the sea and pull on their masks and flippers, hanging their spears from belts at their sides. Rolph looks thin; he needs more exercise. He's timid in the water. His mother is a reader and a gardener, and Lou is constantly having to fight her influence. He wishes that Rolph could live with him, but his lawyer just shakes his head whenever he mentions it. The fish are beautiful, easy targets, nibbling at coral. Lou has speared seven by the time he realizes that Rolph hasn't killed a single one.

"What's the problem, son?" he asks, when they surface.

"I just like watching them," Rolph says.

They've drifted toward a spit of rocks extending into the sea. Carefully they climb from the water. The tide pools throng with starfish and urchins and sea cucumbers; Rolph crouches, poring over them. Lou's fish hang from a netted bag at his waist. From the beach, Mindy is watching them through Fiona's binoculars. She waves, and Lou and Rolph wave back.

"Dad," Rolph asks, lifting a tiny green crab from a tide pool, "what do you think about Mindy?"

"Mindy's great. Why?"

The crab splays its little claws; Lou notes with approval that his son knows how to hold it safely. Rolph squints up at him. "You know. Is she the right amount of crazy?"

Lou gives a hoot of laughter. He'd forgotten the earlier conversation, but Rolph forgets nothing—a quality that delights his father. "She's crazy enough. But crazy isn't everything."

"I think she's rude," Rolph says.

"Rude to *you*?"

"No. To Albert."

Lou turns to his son, cocking his head. "Albert?"

Rolph releases the crab and begins to tell the story. He remembers each thing—the porch, the stairs, "Room 3"—realizing as he speaks how much he has wanted to tell his father this, as punishment to Mindy. Lou listens keenly, without interrupting. But as Rolph goes on he senses the story landing heavily, in a way he doesn't understand. When he finishes talking, his father takes a long breath and lets it out. He looks back at the beach. It's nearly sunset, and people are shaking the fine white sand from their towels and packing up for the day. The hotel has a disco, and the group plans to go dancing there after dinner.

"When exactly did this happen?" Lou asks.

"The same day as the lions—that night." Rolph waits a moment, then asks, "Why do you think she was rude like that?"

"Women are cunts," his father says. "That's why."

Rolph gapes at him. His father is angry, a muscle jumping in his jaw, and without warning Rolph is angry, too: assailed by a deep, sickening rage that stirs in him very occasionally—most often when he and Charlie come back from a riotous weekend around their father's pool, rock stars jamming on the roof, guacamole and big pots of chili, to find their mother alone in her bungalow, drinking peppermint tea. Rage at this man who casts everyone aside.

"They are not—" He can't make himself repeat the word.

"They are," Lou says tightly. "Pretty soon you'll know it for sure."

Rolph turns away from his father. There is nowhere to go, so he jumps into the sea and begins slowly paddling his way back toward the shore. The sun is low, the water choppy and full of shadows. Rolph imagines sharks just under his feet, but he doesn't turn or look back. He keeps swimming toward that white sand, knowing instinctively that his struggle to stay afloat is the most exquisite torture he can concoct for his father—knowing also that, if he sinks, Lou will jump in instantly and save him.

That night, Rolph and Charlie are allowed to have wine at dinner. Rolph dislikes the sour taste, but enjoys the swimmy blur it makes of his surroundings: the giant beaklike flowers all over the dining room; his father's speared fish cooked by the chef with olives and tomatoes; Mindy in a shimmery green dress. His father's arm is around her. He isn't angry anymore, so neither is Rolph.

Lou has spent the past hour in bed, fucking Mindy senseless. Now he keeps one hand on her slim thigh, reaching under her hem, waiting for that cloudy look she gets. Lou is a man who cannot tolerate defeat—can't *perceive* it as anything but a spur to his own inevitable victory. He doesn't give a shit about Albert—Albert is invisible, Albert is nothing. (In fact, Albert has left the group and returned to his Mombasa apartment.) What matters now is that *Mindy* understand this.

He refills Mildred's and Fiona's wineglasses until their cheeks are patchy and flushed. "You still haven't taken me bird-watching," he chides them. "I keep asking, but it never happens."

"We could go tomorrow," Mildred says. "There are some coastal birds we're hoping to see."

"Is that a promise?"

"A solemn promise."

"Come on," Charlie whispers to Rolph. "Let's go outside."

They slip from the crowded dining room and skitter onto the silvery beach. The palm trees make a slapping, rainy sound, but the air is dry.

"It's like Hawaii," Rolph says, wanting it to be true. The ingredients are there: the dark, the beach, his sister. But it doesn't feel the same.

"Without the rain," Charlie says.

"Without Mom," Rolph says.

"I think Dad's going to marry Mindy," Charlie says.

"No way! He doesn't love her."

"So? He can still marry her."

They sink onto the sand, still faintly warm, radiating a lunar glow. The ghost sea tumbles against it.

"She's not so bad," Charlie says.

"I don't like her. And why are you the world's expert?"

Charlie shrugs. "I know Dad."

Charlie doesn't yet know herself. Four years from now, at eighteen, she'll join a cult across the Mexican border whose charismatic leader promotes a diet of raw eggs; she'll nearly die from salmonella poisoning before Lou rescues her. A cocaine habit will require partial reconstruction of her nose, changing her appearance, and a series of feckless, domineering men will leave her solitary in her late twenties, trying to broker peace between Rolph and Lou, who will have stopped speaking.

But Charlie *does* know her father. He'll marry Mindy because that's what winning means, and because Mindy's eagerness to finish this odd episode and return to her studies will last until precisely the moment when she unlocks the door to her Berkeley apartment and walks into the smell of simmering lentils: one of the cheap stews that she and her roommates survive on. She'll collapse onto the swaybacked couch they found on the sidewalk and unpack her many books, realizing that in the weeks of lugging them through Africa she has read virtually nothing. And when the phone rings her heart will flip.

Structural dissatisfaction: Returning to circumstances that once pleased you, after having experienced a more thrilling or opulent way of life, and finding that you can no longer tolerate them.

Suddenly, Rolph and Charlie are galloping up the beach, drawn by the pulse of light and music from the open-air disco. They run barefoot into the crowd, trailing powdery sand onto a translucent dance floor overlaid on lozenges of flashing color. The shuddering bass line seems to interfere with Rolph's heartbeat.

"C'mon," Charlie says. "Let's dance."

She begins to undulate in front of him—the way the new Charlie is planning to dance when she gets home. But Rolph is embarrassed; he can't dance that way. The rest of the group surrounds them. Louise, the twelve-year-old, is dancing with Dean, the actor. Ramsey flings his arms around one of the Phoenix-faction moms. Lou and Mindy dance close together, their whole bodies touching, but Mindy is thinking of Albert, as she will, periodically, after marrying Lou and having two daughters, Lou's fifth and sixth children, in quick succession, as if sprinting against the inevitable drift of his attention. On paper he'll be penniless, and Mindy will end up working as a travel agent to support her little girls. For a time, her life will be joyless; the girls will seem to cry too much, and she'll think longingly of this trip to Africa as the last perfect moment of her life, when she still had a choice, when she was free and unencumbered. She'll dream senselessly, futilely, of Albert, wondering what he is doing at particular moments, and how her life would have turned out if she'd run away with him as he suggested, half joking, when she visited him in Room 3. Later, of course, she'll recognize "Albert" as nothing more than a focus of regret for her own immaturity and disastrous choices. When both her children are in high school, she'll finally resume her studies, complete her Ph.D. at U.C.L.A., and begin an academic career at forty-five, spending long periods doing social-structures field work in the Brazilian rain forest. Her youngest daughter will go to work for Lou, become his protégée, and inherit his business.

"Look," Charlie tells Rolph, over the music. "The bird-watchers are watching us."

Mildred and Fiona are sitting on chairs beside the dance floor, waving in their long print dresses. It's the first time the children have seen them without binoculars.

"Maybe we remind them of birds," Charlie says.

"Or maybe when there are no birds they watch people," Rolph says.

"Come on, Rolphus," Charlie says. "Dance with me."

She takes hold of his hands. As they move together, Rolph feels his self-consciousness miraculously fade, as if he were growing up right there on the dance floor, becoming a boy who dances with girls like his sister. Charlie feels it, too. In fact, this particular memory is one she'll return to again and again, for the rest of her life, long after Rolph has shot himself in the head in their father's house at twenty-eight: her brother as a boy, hair slicked flat, eyes sparkling, shyly learning to dance. But the woman who remembers won't be Charlie; after Rolph dies, she'll revert to her real name—Charlene—unlatching herself forever from the girl who danced with her brother in Africa. Charlene will cut her hair short and go to law school. When she gives birth to a son, she'll want to name him Rolph, but her parents will still be too shattered for her to do this. So she'll call him that privately, just in her mind, and years later she'll stand with her mother among a crowd of cheering parents beside a field, watching him play, a dreamy look on his face as he glances at the sky.

"Charlie!" Rolph says. "Guess what I just figured out."

Charlie leans toward her brother, who is grinning with his news. He cups both hands into her hair to be heard above the thudding beat. His warm, sweet breath fills her ear.

"I don't think those ladies were ever watching birds," Rolph says. ♦

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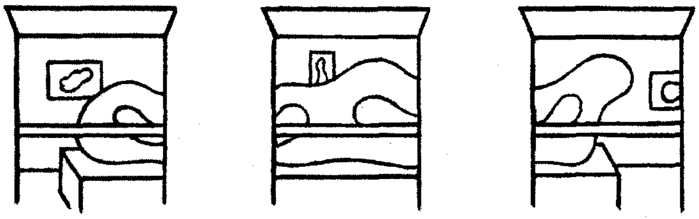


BOOKS

HITCHED

In her new memoir, Elizabeth Gilbert gets married.

BY ARIEL LEVY

Late one cold November night, in the suburbs of New York, a thirty-one-year-old blonde was sobbing on her bathroom floor. She didn't want to be married anymore, she realized: "I was trying so hard not to know this, but the truth kept insisting itself to me." She had accomplished a great deal, domestically speaking—she had answered the questions of where to live and with whom. Unfortunately, she had succeeded at the wrong life: "*I don't want to be married anymore. I don't want to live in this big house. I don't want to have a baby.*" Elizabeth Gilbert recounted this crisis toward the beginning of her monstrously successful 2006 memoir, "Eat, Pray, Love." In that bathroom, in that marriage, Gilbert was a heroine out of Ibsen, or possibly Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Marriage, in "Eat, Pray, Love," is a prison, destined to derange its female inmates. But Gilbert's memoir is a cultural artifact of the new millennium, not the late nineteenth century. The heroine wanted to roam free, and so she did.

After her divorce, Gilbert travelled across Italy, India, and Indonesia. Wanderlust is at the core of her nature. She has compared herself to "a fussy baby who can fall asleep only in a moving car." Before Gilbert wrote her bestseller, she had already published "Pilgrims," a short-story collection about drifters and pioneers, and "The Last American Man," a biography of the contemporary naturalist Eustace Conway, who abandoned a comfortable suburban life to wear animal skins in the wilds of Appalachia, where he used a cave as his office. Gilbert has always been interested in restless characters seeking extraordinary experiences, and eventually she became one herself.

First came despair. Gilbert was suicidal after her marriage ended, sitting, at one point, with kitchen knife in hand, contemplating her wrists. She writes that she "became a student of my own depressed experience." Research has long been Gilbert's preferred coping mechanism. When she was still married and trying to decide whether to have children, she "spent two frantic years interviewing every woman I could—married, single, childless, artistic, archetypically maternal," in an attempt to divine her own optimal path. She even does this with problems that don't seem particularly problematic: in Italy, she set herself the challenge of learning how pleasure is "most efficiently maximized," studying her subject "like a homework assignment." (She had other high-class difficulties to ponder during the yearlong journey that provided the source material for "Eat, Pray, Love." "Here's what's strange," she observes at one point. "I haven't seemed to be able to do any yoga since getting to Rome.")

It does not take a lot to get Gilbert worked up. A medicine man she met in Bali once told her, "You have more good luck than anyone I've ever met." Then he diagnosed her defect: "Always you get too emotional." A few years later, she returns to see him again, and at first he doesn't recognize her. Here is how Gilbert describes the experience:

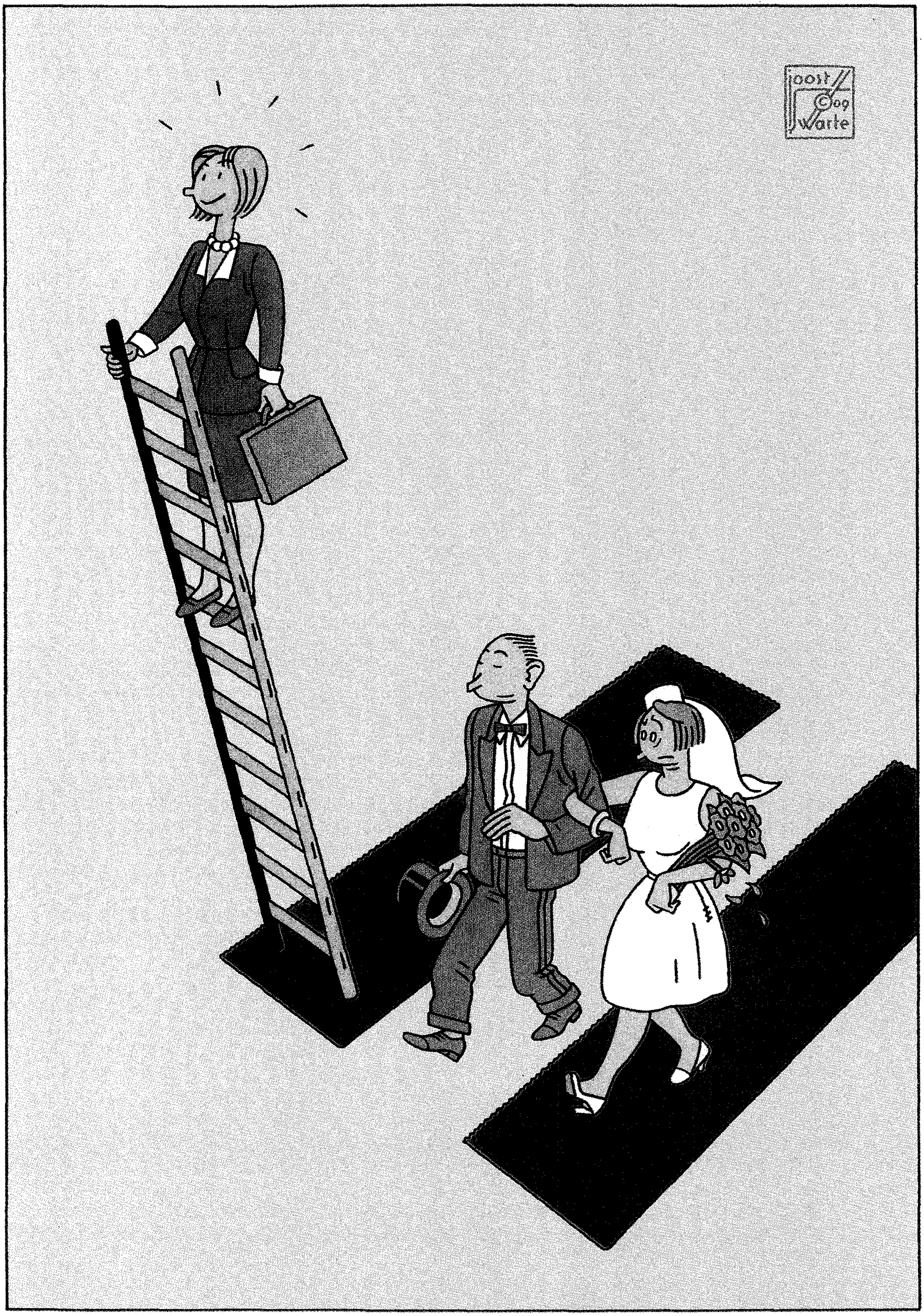
> It's like I was in a car accident, and my car went over a bridge and sank to the bottom of a river and I'd somehow managed to free myself from the sunken car by swimming through an open window and then I'd been frog-kicking and struggling to swim all the way up to the daylight through the cold, green water and I was almost out of oxygen and the arteries were bursting out of my neck and my cheeks were puffed with my last breath and then—GASP!—I broke through to the surface and took in huge gulps of air. And I survived. That gasp, that breaking through—this is what it feels like when I hear the Indonesian medicine man say, "You came back!" My relief is exactly that big.

Keeping things in perspective is not Gilbert's strong suit. This is why she goes on so many trips and does so much information gathering: she wants to understand how her fellow-humans have resolved the issues that torment her.

So we should not be surprised that when Gilbert found herself on the verge of a second wedding, in a state of dread, she decided "to put a little effort into unraveling the mystery of what in the name of God and human history this befuddling, vexing, contradictory, and yet stubbornly enduring institution of marriage actually is." She consulted books and scholars. She interviewed Hmong grandmothers in the mountains of Vietnam about their level of marital satisfaction. She went to see her grandmother. The result is Gilbert's new book, a journey through domestic history and her own neuroses, "Committed: A Skeptic Makes Peace with Marriage" (Viking; $26.95).

Gilbert had not intended to remarry. Both she and her gentleman friend Felipe—a Brazilian gem trader she met in Bali, who provided her with passion and adoration and a tidy romantic ending for "Eat, Pray, Love"—had been "so badly gutted" by their divorces that they "had sworn with all our hearts to never, ever, under any circumstances, marry." But Felipe is not an American citizen. After one too many trips to the United States to visit Gilbert and to sell his rocks, Felipe was taken away in handcuffs from immigration control at the Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport, and told that he could not return to the U.S. unless he had an American wife. Gilbert, then, is "sentenced to marry," and she's none too pleased

ABOVE: PHILIPPE WEISBECKER; OPPOSITE: JOOST SWARTE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Single women, Gilbert says, are more successful in their careers than married ones; the real benefits of marriage go to men.

about it. "I felt mournful and sucker punched and heavy and banished from some fundamental aspect of my being," she writes. "But most of all I felt *caught*."

Marriage is an anachronism. It is a relic from a time when we needed an arrangement to manage property and reproduction and, crucially, to establish kinships for purposes of defense: safety in numbers. A web of families connected through marriage produced a clan of people who were less likely to kill you than everybody else was. Such was the life style in the Fertile Crescent, and, not coincidentally, the Old Testament is fixated on genealogy. Sexual reproduction within marriage was a way of creating more of God's chosen people. Originally, Jewish holy men were required to be married.

With the advent of Jesus Christ and the New Testament, marriage fell from grace. The early Christian ideal was a utopian human family, an earthly mirror of Heaven above, unafflicted by the rivalries and allegiances of bloodlines. Jesus was not the marrying kind. "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters," Jesus taught, "he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). St. Paul decreed, in his First Letter to the Corinthians, "It is good for a man not to touch a woman," and said he wished "that all men were even as I myself"—celibate. "If they cannot contain," Paul conceded, "let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn." This is, as Gilbert notes, "perhaps the most begrudging endorsement of matrimony in human history."

For contemporary political purposes, marriage is often depicted as a timeless and unchanging institution; actually, it has been enormously elastic throughout history and across cultures. In nineteenth-century China, it was perfectly acceptable for a young woman to marry a dead man, an arrangement called a "ghost marriage," which enabled families to consolidate their wealth and power and allowed enterprising young women to pursue their ambitions without the interference of a living husband or children. (Such husbands were very popular. "It was not so easy to find an unmarried dead man to marry," a ghost bride is quoted as saying in Janice Stockard's "Daughters of the Canton Delta.") Among Eskimo in northern Alaska, there was a tradition of creating co-spousal arrangements in which a quartet swapped husbands and wives. Shiites and Babylonian Jews recognized *mut'a:* temporary marriages. If a man was granted a "wife for a day," the couple could be seen in public together and even have sex. "The man and woman had no obligation toward each other once the contract was over," Stephanie Coontz writes in "Marriage, a History." "But if the woman bore a child as a result of the relationship, that child was legitimate and was entitled to share in the father's inheritance." Couples in modern revolutionary Iran can still petition mullahs for a similar marital day pass.

For all the variability in the meaning of marriage, one fairly consistent element over time and place was that it had nothing to do with love. "For most of history it was inconceivable that people would choose their mates on the basis of something as fragile and irrational as love and then focus all their sexual, intimate, and altruistic desires on the resulting marriage," Coontz writes. In fact, loving one's spouse too much was considered a threat to social and religious order, and was discouraged in societies as disparate as ancient Greece, medieval Islam, and contemporary Cameroon. The modern Western ideal of marriage as both romantic and companionate is an anomaly and a gamble. As soon as people in any culture start selecting spouses based on emotion, the rates of broken marriages shoot up. "By unnerving definition," Gilbert writes, "anything that the heart has chosen for its own, mysterious reasons it can always unchoose."

In the United States today, it's not difficult to see why men would want to marry women. As Gilbert points out, "Married men live longer than single men; . . . married men accumulate more wealth than single men; married men are far less likely to die a violent death than single men; married men report themselves to be much happier than single men; and married men suffer less from alcoholism, drug addiction, and depression than do single men." Nor is it hard to see why gay people might want the right to wed: practical considerations aside, it would be a statement of acceptance for people who, until recently, were considered morally defective or criminal. But when it comes to women marrying men it's a different story.

We marry most often because we are in love and we think it will make us happy. Yet married women are more likely to suffer from depression than single women are. According to Gilbert, married women are not as successful in their careers as single women. Married women are arguably less healthy than single women. Married women, until recently, were more likely to die a violent death than single women—usually, at the hands of their own husbands. Sociologists, Gilbert claims, call this phenomenon "the 'Marriage Benefit Imbalance'—a tidy name for an almost freakishly doleful conclusion: that women generally lose in the exchange of marriage vows, while men win big."

Marrying for money hasn't exactly gone out of fashion, but generally we are not engaging in strategic dynastic mergers. And in contemporary America we no longer need to get married to produce additional farmhands. So what's the point?

Gilbert is understandably alarmed by what she learns. She is most affecting in "Committed" when she is contemplating the marriages of the women in her own family. Her grandmother Maude was considered ineligible for marriage, because she had a harelip, and she spent her youth independent and happy, getting a better education than her siblings and travelling from her home in Minnesota to the mountains of Montana. During this period of giddy freedom, Maude made her own money and bought herself a glamorous coat with a fur collar. "If you ask my grandmother today about that purchase, her eyes will still flutter in absolute pleasure," Gilbert writes. But then Maude got married after all, and moved in with her husband's family of "severe Swedish immigrants" on their farm. Her days of travel and adventure were over, and her life became dominated by cooking, cleaning, and giving birth to seven children. Grandma Maude's savings were quickly depleted by the endless expenses of the farm, and when her oldest daughter was born Maude cut up her special coat to make baby clothes. "What my grandmother did with her fine coat (the loveliest thing she would ever own) is what all the women of that generation (and before) did for their families and their husbands and their children," Gilbert writes. "They cut up the finest and proudest parts of themselves and gave it all away. They repatterned what was theirs and shaped it for others."

"Committed" is an unfurling of Gilbert's profound anxiety about reëntering a legally binding arrangement that she does not really believe in. All this ambivalence, expressed in her high-drama prose, can be a lot to handle. (One generally doesn't indulge another person's emotional processing at this length unless the jabbering is likely to conclude with sex.) Ultimately, Gilbert is clear about what she, like most people, wants: everything. We want intimacy and autonomy, security and stimulation, reassurance and novelty, coziness and thrills. But we can't have it. Gilbert understands this, yet she tries to convince herself and her readers that she has found a loophole. She tells herself a familiar story, that *her* marriage will be different. And she is, of course, right—everyone's marriage is different. But everyone's marriage is a compromise.

The "peace and contentment" at which Gilbert abruptly arrives in the final chapter of the book is a little suspicious, given the hundreds of pages of panic that have preceded it. She shifts from her previous narrative—marriage as incarceration—to its lighthearted antithesis: marriage as deliverance. As in all romantic comedies, from the novels of Jane Austen to the "Sex and the City" movie, "Committed" ends with a wedding that brings with it the cessation of doubt and strife. Gilbert's aunt sings "La Vie en Rose," and the family dog curls up "on the floor right between Felipe and me just as we were sealing these promises." There is good reason to end such stories with weddings, buoyant celebrations of love. Because what follows a wedding is a marriage. And marriage is an institution, not a party. ♦

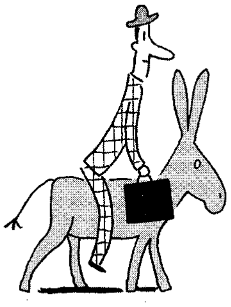
NEWYORKER.COM/GO/ASK

Ariel Levy holds a live chat with readers.

BRIEFLY NOTED

Summertime, *by J. M. Coetzee (Viking; $25.95).* In the early seventies, a young unpublished writer returns to his native South Africa after a disgrace abroad. His name is John Coetzee, and he both is and isn't the Nobel-winning author of this unorthodox book. Where the real Coetzee had a wife and children at the time, his doppelgänger shares a crumbling house with his widowed father and engages in fitful affairs with married women, one of whom judges him "autistic" in bed. These "facts" emerge from interviews conducted by a biographer nearly four decades later, after Coetzee's (imagined) death. At stake is what it means to commit oneself: to a person, a place, a moral imperative. One ex-lover marvels that a man so emotionally remote should become a novelist, which requires delivering "reports, expert reports, on intimate human experience"—precisely Coetzee's feat here. Not since "Disgrace" has he written with such urgency and feeling.

The Hidden, *by Tobias Hill (Harper Perennial; $14.99).* The metaphorical resonances of an archeological dig are put to fine use in this tense novel. Ben Mercer has fled his failed marriage and his studies at Oxford, and a chance encounter brings him to an excavation near Sparta. An ominous mood seems to hang over the ragtag group, consisting of an ineffective American leader, a quartet of Greek laborers, and a clique of young, beautiful foreigners. As Ben gradually ingratiates himself, he begins to realize that half-heard conversations conceal a sin greater than he can face. Chapters of Spartan history—bellicose, sinister, and doomed—offer engrossing thematic and historical context, though the political motives underpinning the final atrocity feel somewhat unconvincing. What's enthralling is the gradual unwrapping of Ben's character, as his own weaknesses and corruptions emerge.



Charles Dickens, *by Michael Slater (Yale; $35).* Slater, in this enormously detailed biography, gives a vivid sense of Dickens's quotidian existence, and when he isn't noting dates or fees sets about identifying the people and events that Dickens's "clutching eye" transmuted into fiction. Most famous is the twelve-year-old Dickens's yearlong stint at a blacking factory while his father was in debtors' prison, an experience that endowed him not only with much novelistic material but also with a determination to use satire and pathos to crusade "on behalf of the poor and the powerless." Slater, who has edited Dickens's journalism, emphasizes the variety of his subject's activities—the tireless writing, performing, and hosting. He refuses to speculate about Dickens's personal life—whether, for instance, the young actress for whom he wrote off his twenty-two-year marriage actually became his mistress—but assiduously annotates the emotional background that gave rise to each text. Unrequited love for the actress, Slater suggests, spawned "Great Expectations."

Boyle, *by Michael Hunter (Yale; $55).* This painstakingly researched biography of the seventeenth-century scientist Robert Boyle outlines a life in which "science and theology were truly complementary" but not always in harmony. Best known for Boyle's law, which established a constant relationship between air's volume and its pressure, Boyle was a moralist from a privileged upbringing whose conception of science—both of its empirical basis and of its transformative potential for mankind—was far ahead of its time. He also believed in "the study of nature as a means of glorifying God," and the result, Hunter writes, was an intellectual program that was "experimentally based, intellectually rigorous, theistic, and practical." However, he was also drawn to magic and alchemy, and Hunter shows that the struggle between piety and scientific curiosity often disturbed him.

THE THEATRE

SIDESHOW

Deconstructing "Romeo and Juliet."

BY HILTON ALS

Shakespeare had his tacky side—an innate showmanship that kept audience members in their seats at the Globe. He knew what turned people on, and why: youth-oriented plots and subplots were guaranteed to excite theatregoers, if only because the adults in the crowd would delight in knowing what was going to happen before the child protagonists had a clue. And while he didn't necessarily equate adolescence with vulgarity, he often played up the garish self-absorption of youth, the coarse poetry to be found in a new heart or mind working things out—or avoiding things: the callow Prince Hal, who doesn't like to look back, least of all at those who have loved him; the testosterone-driven adolescent Florizel, who adds gristle to the already chewy plot of "The Winter's Tale," with his love for the virginal Perdita.

Sometimes the only love that Shakespeare's youths are able to show is for themselves. Sometimes they fall in love with the rush of love, as in "Romeo and Juliet." "Everything is sudden in this play," Mark Van Doren wrote of this tragedy. The action of "Romeo and Juliet" is dramaturgically simple and theatrically thrilling. Shakespeare lays it out in the impassioned sonnet that opens the play:

> Two households, both alike in dignity
> In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,
> From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
> Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.
> From forth the fatal loins of these two foes
> A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life;
> Whose misadventur'd piteous overthrows
> Doth with their death bury their parents' strife.

And that, in a nutshell, is the plot. We watch this perennial favorite—onstage and onscreen—not for the complications of its drama but for the pleasure of seeing its almost cheesy melodrama unfold. (The great Shakespeare scholar Harold Goddard once noted that by referring to "star-cross'd lovers" in the Prologue the Bard "surrendered this drama to the astrologers.")

Any production that delves deeply into "Romeo and Juliet" is going to expose its gooey sentimentality and its relentlessly pop handling of sex, rebellion, and adolescent desire. (The script, which was the inspiration for Jerome Robbins's "West Side Story," could just as easily be adapted into a "Twilight" movie, so adroitly does it play on the teen-age idea of love as a state of extreme ecstasy.) Harold Bloom, in his essential book "Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human," however, argues against any attempt to tone down the play. To distance yourself from the articulation of Juliet's deep feeling, he says, is to "shame yourself by bringing irony to a contemplation of her consciousness." If you agree with Bloom, then the Nature Theatre of Oklahoma has irredeemably shamed itself with its fundamentally ironic "Romeo and Juliet" (at the Kitchen), which is an essay masquerading as a spectacle about America's indifference to dramatic literature, Shakespeare, and theatre itself.

The premise is simple. Pavol Liska and Kelly Copper, the husband-and-wife team who co-conceive and co-direct most of the pieces for the Nature Theatre of Oklahoma, an avant-garde company based in New York, asked a number of friends and performers to recount what they could remember of the story of "Romeo and Juliet." The responses form the text: a series of amusingly garbled monologues spoken by two performers, Anne Gridley and Robert M. Johanson. In fact, everything about this show is garbled, down at heel, and amateurish, which, one assumes, was Liska and Copper's intention. The set is inspired by commedia dell'arte: stage curtains and scrolls are painted on the wall. One can almost imagine Anna Magnani stepping out of "The Golden Coach" to join the proceedings. Instead, we get the incredible in a different

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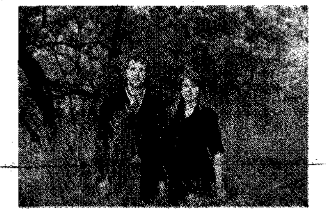

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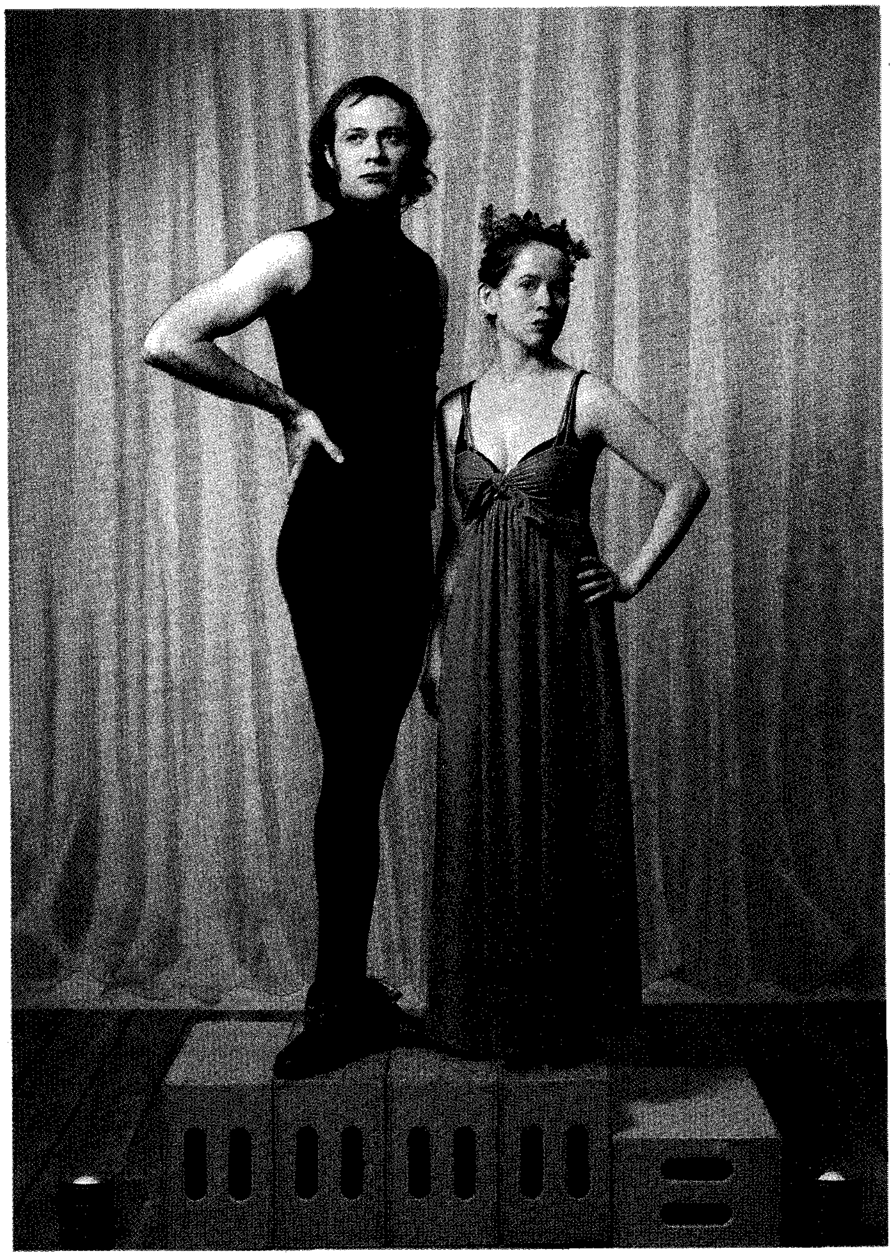
form: Anne Gridley. Small and lithe, she's dressed in a floor-length orange gown with spaghetti straps and a little bow at the bodice, a black bra visible beneath. The wreath of fake red flowers that sits on top of her head, with a sad silk ribbon trailing behind, seems tacked on, slightly askew. Gridley resembles nothing so much as Imogene Coca "doing" Shakespeare. She takes the stage with a smug, self-satisfied expression. She looks out at the audience, and before she has even said a word you have to laugh at the way she revels in her own pomposity. In the round tones of a classically trained *act*-or, gesticulating slowly, then wildly, she says:

> Uhhh . . .
> Romeo and Juliet?
> The Capulets—
> And the—?
> (And I can't remember the other guys.)
> Came from two families
> That didn't—
> That were warring?
> Against each other?
> Aaannnd . . .
> The two young people fell in love—
> (Even though they were WAY too YOUNG to do ANYTHING!)
> Aaannnd . . .
> Because they couldn't be together—
> They—
> DIED.
> How's that?
> Is that fast enough?
>
> There were fights.
> The—
> But then—
> I know Romeo killed—
> The best—
> The brother I think of Juliet or something.
> I can't remember . . .
> And uhhhh . . .
> It was basically about keeping the two young people apart.


Johanson and Gridley take on the star-cross'd lovers. Photograph by Ethan Levitas.

After Gridley finishes this monologue, Johanson begins one, then Gridley again, and they continue to alternate for ninety minutes, with no intermission, which seems right—you wouldn't want to lose track of the ideas that Liska and Copper are putting forth. But what are those ideas, exactly? On one level, they're about love and showbiz and the sadness at the center of both: love can vanish; all spectacles must come to an end. And you feel a certain wistfulness when a chicken (Elisabeth Conner) takes the stage and does a little dance between the monologues. The chicken is "entertainment," just as "Romeo and Juliet" is.

The piece is also, inevitably, about language. How do we speak poetry—which is metalanguage—in a culture in which the primary means of communication is visual, in which language is as antiquated as Johanson's intentionally John Barrymore-like delivery? (His monologues are in the same vein as Gridley's but tend to include references to pop icons such as Anna Nicole Smith.) Gridley and Johanson are all performance. We're too busy watching them to hear them. Not until the end of the show, when the lights go down and they perform, unseen, the famous balcony scene from Act II of "Romeo and Juliet," do we register both the language and the depth of feeling in it.

It's in Gridley and Johanson that we see the strengths and the weaknesses of the Nature Theatre of Oklahoma's aesthetic. Gridley's work is that of an adult having fun while commenting on her own performance and on performance in general, whereas Johanson sometimes seems like an overgrown boy who insists on taking up too much space. This was also the problem with the Nature Theatre's "Rambo Solo," a companion piece to "Romeo and Juliet," which featured an actor talking about his obsession with the book "First Blood." (Both shows premièred at the Salzburg Festival in 2008 and toured in Europe before coming to New York.) Watching Johanson, one wonders if Liska and Copper's interest in this kind of sophomoric male character, with an exaggerated sense of entitlement, diminishes their project—while pandering to European audiences, who may still believe that the New World is, culturally speaking, filled with rubes. ♦

POP MUSIC

WHAT DO YOU WANT?

Annie's underground mainstream.

BY SASHA FRERE-JONES

There is a recurring aversion on the part of American labels to foreign singers, and it sometimes amounts to a mutual distrust. Kylie Minogue, the tiny Australian who has annexed most of Europe, has had only three hits here. Girls Aloud, the devilishly clever flagship act of the producer Brian Higgins and his Xenomania production team, generally doesn't release records outside Britain. For many such acts, the American mountain can sometimes appear like too much bother, since even superstars can't gain purchase. But given the retro-eighties feel and Euro-friendly nature of the year's biggest female star, Lady Gaga, why not admit an actual European, who is even more fond of the eighties, into the game?

Anne Lilia Berge Strand, a Berlin-based Norwegian singer-songwriter known as Annie, has no American label behind her. Her second album, "Don't Stop," a brash, bright, and easily absorbed pop effort, was completed in 2008 but is only now being released, jointly, by Annie's Totally Records and an independent label in Norway called Smalltown Supersound. (After working on an earlier version, Annie was dropped by Island in Europe.)

Is there something inherently Norwegian about Annie that might scare off Americans? She sings in English, and her accent, audible when speaking, is almost imperceptible when she sings, and her high, aspirate voice avoids the rafters and stays in a conversational range and timbre. (This might be a strike against her, considering the taste Americans have developed for glass-shatterers, thanks in part to "American Idol.")

As a performer, Annie shouldn't be a hard sell. A small, sharp, and evenly proportioned blonde, she photographs well and throws herself confidently into all kinds of dancing and role-playing. With Annie, there is no particularly complicated relationship to pop—she makes records and videos as if she organically, naturally loved the form. She is not a refugee from the world of theatre, and she has no unpublished string quartet about wombats up her sleeve. In fact, Annie's first release—ten years old now—was "The Greatest Hit," a new song sung over a big sample of Madonna's "Everybody" (which was *her* first single, released in 1982). Not exactly fighting the system. Annie's initial bit of brilliance was the 2003 single "Chewing Gum," produced by Richard X, who was one of the few bedroom-studio types to cross over from the British mash-up scene of the early aughts into actual producing.

Richard X's first productions reconfigured hits from the eighties, like Gary Numan's "Are 'Friends' Electric?," but he and Annie started from scratch on "Chewing Gum," and came up with a song that easily could have fallen off the back of a 1981 Tom Tom Club album. The sounds, as with most Annie songs, are all brief, discrete flashes and blips, danceable but lighter in bearing than straight house. The songs do not generally thump—they bounce and skate. As is customary with Annie lyrics, the singer is in control—she's dissing disposable, dumb boys who think they are chocolate but are only chewing gum. The more sentimental and straightforward "My Heartbeat," a small blast of sincerity with the drive of a rock band playing disco, was named the best song of 2004 by Pitchfork.

With the spread of talent shows and of YouTube clips of those competitions, odds have changed slightly for Europeans. Leona Lewis, the winner of the third season of "The X-Factor," in 2006, had 2008's biggest-selling single, the purple ballad "Bleeding Love." And, on the main stage, Susan Boyle, currently at 1.8 million units sold, set a rec-

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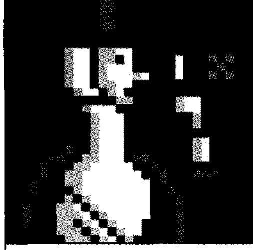

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ord for best first-week sales ever for a female singer.

As an artist who owns her own masters, Annie may be in a position to actually earn something back, especially in the digital realm, where the costs of physical production and distribution are sometimes zero. And though radio moves more slowly than ever to adopt new sounds, television and films are moving faster. One or two licenses to television advertisements could put Annie in the black for the year. (An infinitely more idiosyncratic act from Britain, the brilliant and slightly cracked Micachu and the Shapes, has already landed in a Crayola commercial, a type of deal that will net almost any band more than it will ever see from a year of album royalties.)

Generally popular on blogs, Annie now has a wide-net kind of album that can bring her into as many homes as the viral network allows. Several record executives have told me that NPR has become the prime tool for selling albums outside the teen-pop continuum; "Don't Stop," equally a contemporary dance album and a throwback for parents who are stuck on their Yaz records, would fit right in.

Annie's commitment to brightness is total. "Don't Stop" rides for eight bumptious numbers without trouble, until her cheeriness lands her in the wrong television advertisement. "The Breakfast Song" is a stomper, like aluminum and plastic thwacked together, and the core of the song is a single, possibly unnecessary question: "What do you want, what do you want for breakfast?" Turned into a chant, a potentially cute idea devolves into a harangue. If she takes away all the spritz, Annie gets lost. "When the Night" is the kind of neon-lit dime-store ballad that a-ha or Paul Young could have handled in the eighties, but Annie can't find her way in the melancholy. (Put her back onto the dance floor and she'll fold in the heartbreak between all the strobes.)

Annie worked with Higgins on "Don't Stop," as well as with Richard X and Paul Epworth, but she is a one-woman show if she needs to be. Many of the hundreds of songs that were written for "Don't Stop" were drafted at home on Annie's laptop. She also uses a Tenori-on, a delightful electronic instrument that combines a small synthesizer with a sequencer that renders visually, like a Lite-Brite set come to life. (The British singer Little Boots makes use of one in her live shows, and it often upstages her band.) Though there is nothing inherently political about Annie's music or her story—as has been true, sadly, for thousands of acts through the years—she can be seen as part of a subtle trend that women and machines are creating together. One of "Don't Stop"'s tracks, "I Don't Like Your Band," confronts a problem familiar to anyone who dates musicians: "It's not you, it's your tunes—I don't like your band." There's nothing a mere haircut will do for this guy, and she drops the auxiliary message in the middle of the song: "Buy yourself a sequencer and let the games begin!" Those on the side of the machines are more mobile and not as easily tied to a sound, or to as gendered a sound, as a live band.

Her songs bounce and skate—they're danceable, but lighter than straight house.

AKI-PEKKA SINIKOSKI

As telling as Annie's endorsement of sequencers is her take on radio, in "Songs Remind Me of You," another collaboration with Richard X, which gives a huge nod to Giorgio Moroder's work on Donna Summer's "I Feel Love." This one does thump, though the mood is slightly lost and the words work around a regret. As the song unfolds and the girl sings about a boy from the past, the chorus sounds oddly like a taunt, although the implication is that the boy whose promises "vanished" is actually quite successful: "How does it feel to hear your songs on the radio? And does it hurt to hear those songs on the radio?" The singer loves these songs, apparently—"Music so good, music so clear"—and her delight reinforces the tinge of empathy in the chorus. The singer seems to feel that getting your songs on the radio might not be worth what it costs the songwriter. ♦

THE CURRENT CINEMA

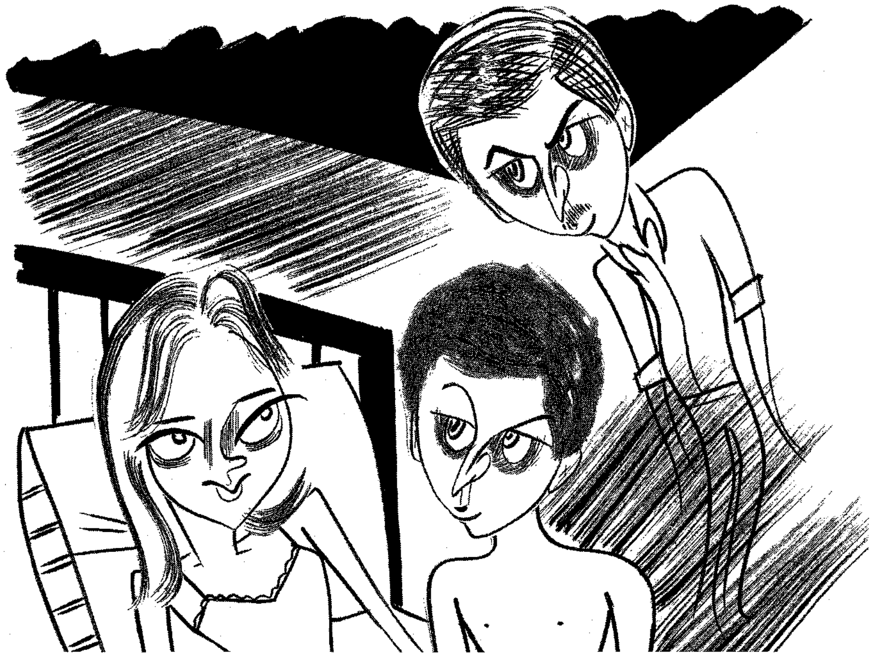
HARD DAYS AND NIGHTS

"Youth in Revolt" and "Sweetgrass."

BY ANTHONY LANE

The hero of "Youth in Revolt" is called Nick Twisp (Michael Cera), and much of the movie is about becoming, or trying to become, the kind of person who wouldn't be called Nick Twisp. This is not easy, since one look at Nick will confirm that, in the eyes of the world, he is the quintessence of Twispiness: well-mannered, light of voice, and as thin as a grebe. He lives with his mother, Estelle (Jean Smart), and she in turn lives with whoever, or whatever, takes her fancy: someone like Jerry (Zach Galifianakis), who is basically a beer gut with a missing conscience and a wandering mind, or Officer Wescott (Ray Liotta), a cop who delivers the sad news of Jerry's apparent demise, and stays around to provide Estelle with extra consolation. Such men are icons of civic diligence compared to Nick's dad, George (Steve Buscemi), who resides elsewhere, and whose opening whine of thanks to his latest girlfriend ("Oh, you made me a *snack!*") tells you all you need to know.

The film, directed by Miguel Arteta, is based on C. D. Payne's original novel, in which Nick is a lad of fourteen. Here he looks a couple of years older—a legally wise alteration, since he not only spends the movie dreaming of sex but ends up having it. The book was an unsurprising hit among teen-agers, who always rejoice to be told of the exact degree to which their parents' generation can be measured as total losers or flat-out creeps. It is written in the first person, a style that is preserved onscreen in voice-over—the ideal form of address, surely, for any self-admiring, self-berating teen-ager. "In the movies, the good guy gets the girl. In real life, it's usually the prick," Nick tells us, as he is dissed by a female schoolmate in a video store while holding a copy of "La Strada." The tang of narcissism is most pronounced in his intellectual pride. We sense it as the camera surveys the crammed bookshelves of his room, although Nick's conspiratorial boast—"I am a voracious reader of classic prose"—is in many ways a risk. Having shown us his hand, he never really bothers to play it for the rest of the film; a classic bookworm would continue to drop authors' names, striving to shape and refine all experience into a sheaf of short stories—to treat life as fit, or fit only, for literary criticism, most likely with calamitous results. The ur-text of this tendency is "The Rachel Papers," Martin Amis's first novel, still unsurpassed in its plumbing of pre-college precocity, but Arteta cannot hold his nerve as Amis does, perhaps for fear of frightening an audience of bibliophobes, and so he settles for the next best thing. Nick, we soon realize, is not a reader, or even a Fellini fan. He is someone who would *like* to read, or like to be thought of as a reader. The voracity is there, but he doesn't eat.



Portia Doubleday and Michael Cera in a movie by Miguel Arteta.

TOM BACHTELL

By a happy chance, he finds someone with a comparable hunger. On vacation with Estelle and Jerry, in a greasy mobile home near a lake, Nick meets Sheeni Saunders (Portia Doubleday), a lofty lass who fells our hero with a glance. We see his enraptured face in the shower immediately afterward, the water bouncing off him in slow motion. (Anybody who has seen "Antichrist" will suspect a spoof here.) Sheeni greets him later with "Hi, stuck-up!," although she has snobbish delusions of her own, visible in the images of Jean-Paul Belmondo on her walls. Again, however, the movie fails to honor its commitment; where the real Belmondo, in "Breathless," took Humphrey Bogart as *his* god, and followed through on the implications of his worship, Sheeni's fancy is no more than a vague nod in the general direction of Frenchness. She claims that her boyfriend, Trent (Jonathan B. Wright), speaks fluent French and writes "Futurist percussive poetry," but when we finally meet this paragon he's just another jock with a silky haircut. What is being set up, in short, is not a genuine culture clash; youth, whatever the title suggests, is not really in revolt, foisting its lyrical ambitions on a prosaic, shockable world. Here, for the umpteenth time, is the tale of a nerd who wants to get laid.

The telling of the tale, to be fair, has patches of sprightliness and zip. I liked the animation that kicks in at irregular moments: stop-motion models of the main characters, for example, in the opening credits, plus a breezy sequence in which Nick, stoned on magic mushrooms, peruses a sex manual, only for its illustrations to float upward from the page and flap around him like butterflies—tiny, hand-drawn couples, rocking back and forth in space. Note that intercourse is viewed by Arteta as infinitely gripping in the buildup, and strangely sweet when it occurs (close to cute, in Nick's case), with no hint of sweat or embarrassment. I can't remember a recent film, not even a Harry Potter episode, that cleaved with so little doubt to the cause of adolescence, leaving all unsavory practices to the grownups. This reaches a vengeful climax when Sheeni's father (M. Emmet Walsh), a grumpy God-fearer, is tricked into sharing the magic mushrooms, and winds up slowly caking his face with mashed potatoes. That will get a big laugh, but I caught a smear of cruelty, too. In Twispworld, it's not enough to ignore your elders; you have to turn them back into babies.

In addition to the cartoons, and a lively score, "Youth in Revolt" has one more trick up its sleeve. Inspired by Sheeni's prejudice, Nick declares, "I've decided to create a supplementary persona named François Dillinger." This means a proper alter ego: not the devilish adviser—Bogart again—who sits opposite Woody Allen in "Play It Again, Sam" and tells him how to get the girl, but a lightly customized Twisp, played by Cera, complete with mustache, shades, buttoned-down blue shirt, white pants, deck shoes, and no socks. More nautical preppy than Gallic, to be honest, and it's a true disappointment to watch the conceit fall flat. Top marks to Arteta for being the first director to produce a post-"Avatar" avatar, and it's not his fault, on a slimline budget, if the secondary Nick isn't nine feet tall with golden Bambi eyes and a complexion the color of Bombay Sapphire. On the other hand, the director probably wasn't banking on his leading man's being so ruthlessly exposed. Cera can be winning enough, with his flat-toned goofiness, in films like "Superbad," but there's only just enough of the guy to fill out one dramatis persona; two at once prove to be beyond him, and, however often Dillinger lounges at the side of the frame, witnessed only by Nick, and offers snarky comments on the action, we never believe in the force of his otherness, let alone his immorality or his cool. Add to this the fact that almost nobody in the adult cast, strong though it is, gets much of a chance to let rip (there should be a law against wasting Steve Buscemi), and you will gather that the movie's well-meant cheerfulness is in danger of running dry. Fortunately, Portia Doubleday is on hand. Serene, sly, and sixteen, Sheeni seems to be the most mature human in sight, and way too accomplished for our hero. "You're my François. The one I've been looking for," she says to little Twisp. *Oui, oui.*

The list of things you won't get from "Sweetgrass" is almost as impressive as the film itself. No narration, though this is a documentary. No music, unless you count a few snatches of song ("Headin' home, baby, headin' home now"), most of them mumbled by an aging fellow on horseback. No way of hearing half the dialogue. No names given for most of the people we meet. No explanatory titles until the end, when we learn that the flock of sheep we have watched being driven over the Beartooth Mountains, in Montana, will be the last. (Economic pressures, one imagines.) And, best of all, no flinching from birth and death.

We already know that farmers don't have a sniff of sentimentality, but it's still bracing to see the sheep breeders in this movie drag a newborn by its hind leg across the straw, or slip the skin of a dead lamb, like a sock, over the torso of an orphaned one, in the hope that the bereaved mother will accept it. As for the man who takes a leak in front of a sheep's fresh corpse, ripped open by a bear, even the Duke, in his "Red River" days, might have scratched his chin in approval. The landscape may be majestic, but the deeds that it cradles teem with complaint and fatigue: we find one shepherd on his cell phone, high on a hilltop, who says of the job, "This is bullshit, Mom," adding, "I'd rather enjoy these mountains than hate 'em." The filmmakers, Ilisa Barbash and Lucien Castaing-Taylor, compiled their footage over three years, and they are right to demand a commensurate patience from the audience: they hold the camera on a ruminating beast, or a noisy shearing, dare you to get bored, wait for you to grow hypnotized, and then, just as you enter a sort of trance, abruptly cut. Only thus, perhaps, can we begin to glimpse the rhythm that has, for more than a century, governed these hard, skillful, good-humored American lives, and which has itself been cut short. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM

The Front Row, a blog about movies.

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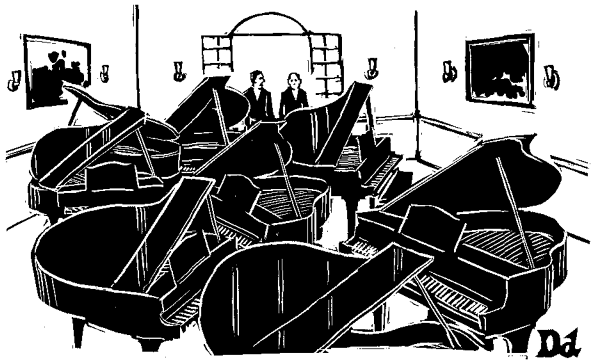
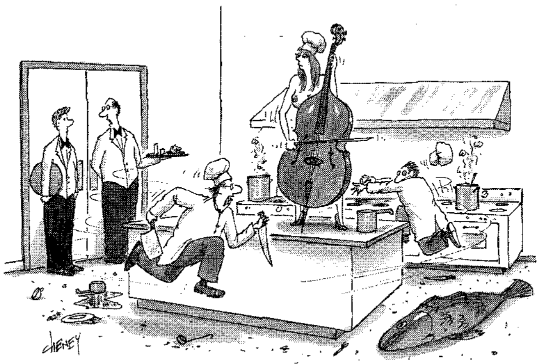
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Jack Ziegler, must be received by Sunday, January 10th. The finalists in the December 21st & 28th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the January 25th issue. The winner receives a signed print of the cartoon. Any resident of the U.S. or Canada (except Quebec) age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"Well, where did you think baby grands came from?"
Sara Willis, Blue Hill, Me.



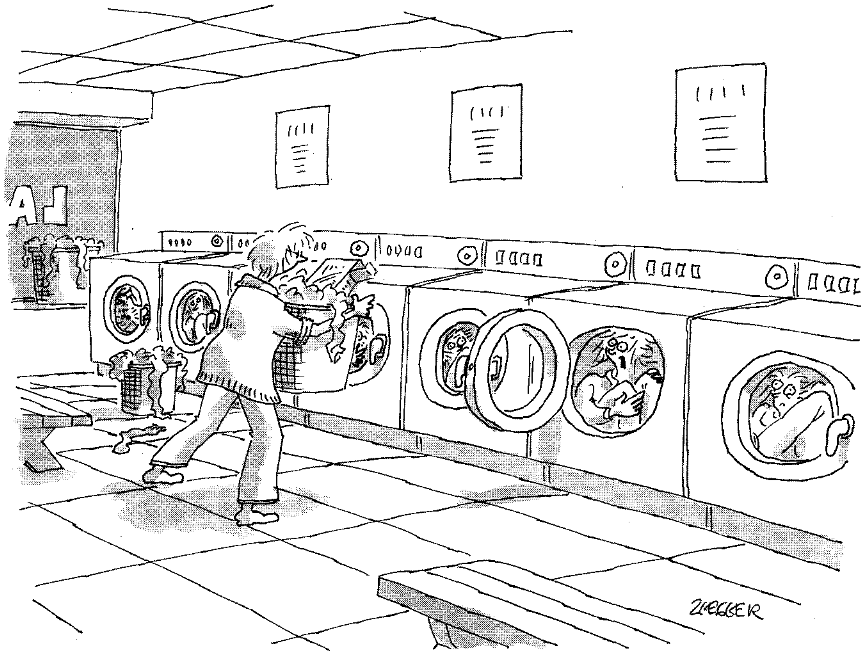
THE FINALISTS

"Let Table Seven know that there will be a slight delay on the risotto."
Teresa Palomar, Baltimore, Md.

"This is why I don't need cable TV."
Jamie Scott Picon, Methuen, Mass.

"There's always room for cello."
James Ninivaggi, Ridgefield, Conn.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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- Al Gore, November 5, 2009
Former Vice President of the United States,
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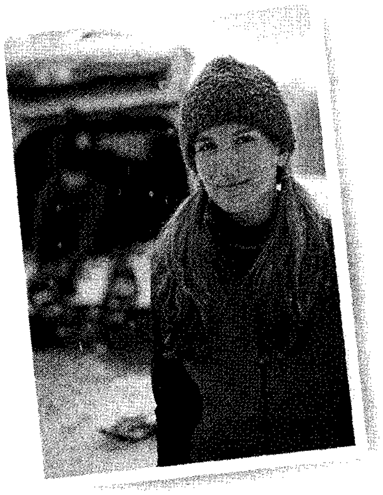

Natural gas can cut our nation's CO_2 emissions from power generation in half. Today. Most alternative energy sources need time and money. Natural gas just needs you. Help us make American natural gas a central part of the country's plans for energy and climate security. Contact your elected representatives and, to learn more about our work, please visit CleanSkies.org.

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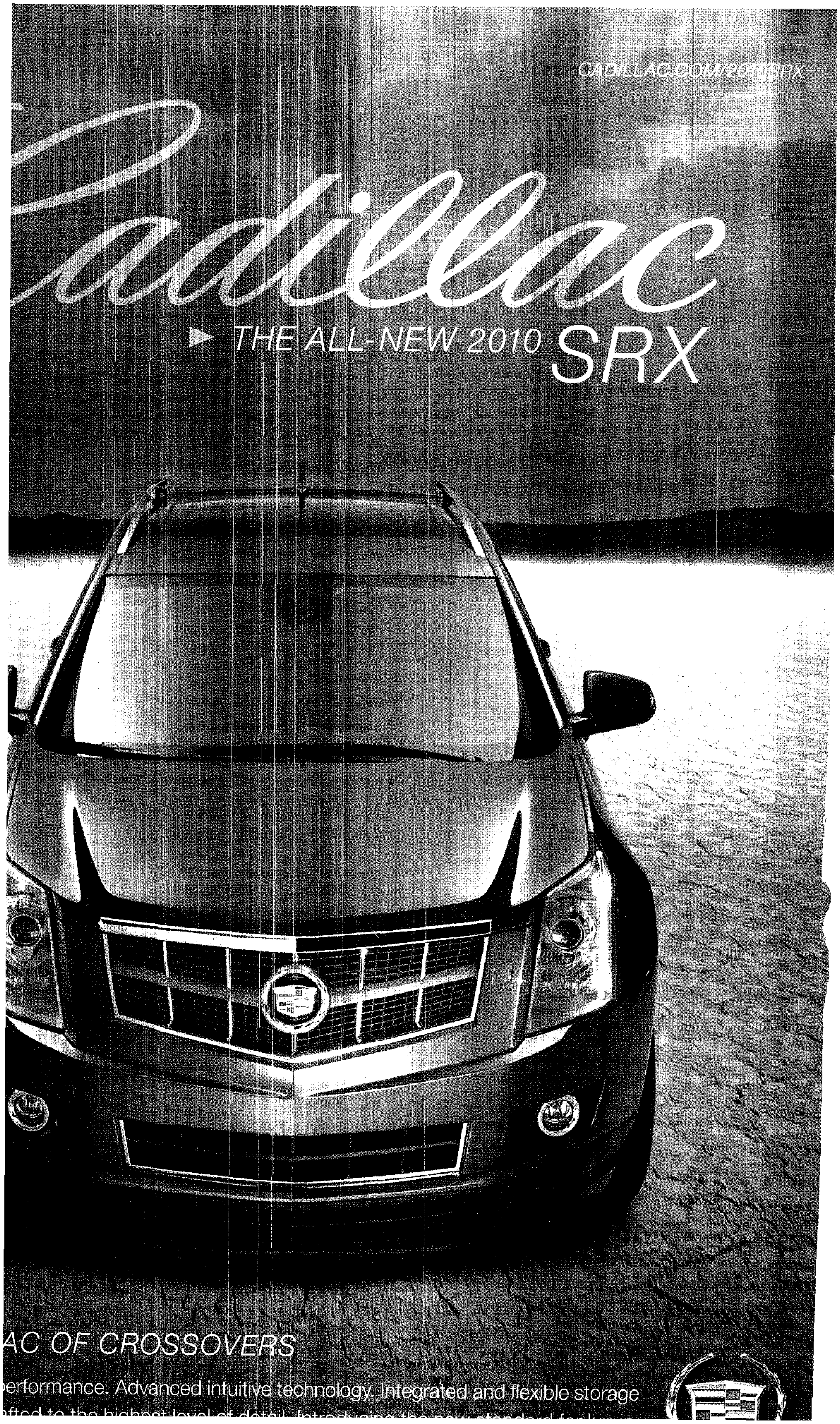
[1] Al Gore Speech at The George Washington University, Washington, D.C., November 5, 2009. These quotations are based on an audio recording provided by Politics and Prose, Washington, D.C., http://politics-prose.com.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